

AUSTRALIA REALMS

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ISSUE
30

Cthulhu Cults!
Cyberpunk

Unae Kults!
Real Combat



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Reviews: GURPS Goblins; Mythos; Palladium vs. AD&D

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Australian Realms

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When we saw this painting on the cover of *GURPS Goblins* we knew we had to have it on our cover too. The friendly folk at Steve Jackson Games were prepared to do great things to arrange it for us. Thank you, Bruce!

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Editorial Letters

I feel GOOD!

The Australian Realms family just keeps growing bigger and stronger. Dave, our longest standing subscriber, thrashed me at Warhammer 40,000 the other day, despite Mork and Gork stomping all over the battlefield on my behalf. It has been great for me to watch Dave grow from an enthusiastic young single lad (when I first met him around issue 6) to a man with a lovely wife and cute baby, Jude.

Dave, like so many of us in our hobby, has faced the challenge of taking on more responsibility without also dropping his childhood friends and passions. It is so important that we all try to hold on to these things as they help to keep us young. By playing games we not only hold onto precious friendships but we also become better able to empathise with and share the enthusiasms of our kids.

And da boyz iz gonna crush Dave's 'ead in next time. Waaagh!

Another addition to the Realms family is *Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1*. Excuse me if I rave on a bit about this milestone, but we don't want anyone to miss this... ***This is a very significant moment*** in the Australian RPG publishing industry. If this book is successful, and how could it not be with the dedicated Realms team pouring heart, soul, blood, sweat and tears into it, then it will trigger an avalanche of further Unae products and possibly even a game system. Now wouldn't that be something, an Australian roleplaying game to call our own.

So grab this chance to have your own home-based RPG company and support *WRC1* any way you can - buy it, tell all your friends about it, read it, play it, write to us and tell us what you think of it. Years from now you can tell your kids that you were there when Australian Realms Inc. and the Unae RPG were born.

Now wouldn't that feel good?

Nick Leaning

Jaal McKittrick
Maryborough QLD

G'day Nick,

Love the Unae material (adapted to my Bludgeons & Flagns campaign), everything you print I can use (changing a few names here and there).

I have noticed a lot lately that Realms are consistent in cracking (funny, mostly) jokes about TSR and its products. Being an ex-member of a gaming club (I moved hence the 'ex') and attending a handful of cons I've found what I call 'D & D bashing' is quite common amongst our scene, me included, until one brave soul reminded everybody at a con auction (who were laughing and carrying on about what loser would buy D&D stuff) where RPGs derived from. This was over 5 years ago, and since then the players have gotten into role (as opposed to roll) playing games a lot more diverse (*Vampire* etc.), not that our community hasn't been into 'experimental' (ie in vogue with the community) for years, it has.

I am not a 'roll'-player, nor a TSR freak, I just think we should remember our roots (what was the first game you ever played). Admittedly, TSR is guilty of overdoing most of the things they're slagged about, and I agree it ain't the best 'system', but just because they're the biggest RPG company that shouldn't be a reason to look down upon it (and those that play it). I've seen it at cons, bigwigs and organisers in the unwritten hierarchy our scene has become. Basically, joking is fine, but when people get uppity about "them dumb D&D losers" it just de-unifies us, when what we need is unity.

Jaal, I agree that the "dumb D&D loser" attitude is divisive. It is also absurd. Anyone who judges the worth or character of another person based on something as profoundly trivial as which RPG he or she plays has lost the plot.

What is the best roleplaying game? Well for me there are two criteria that count when judging such things: Is this fun? Is this harming anyone? If you and your friends are having fun, and you are not harming anyone (including yourselves) then you are playing the right game in the right way.

Simon Bull
Adelaide, SA

Dear Adam (& like-minded folk),

Well, it's certainly great to hear that there are gamers out there looking for Australian products to support! I too have tired of doing my bit to further the American dream, so I've spent the last 8 years developing a comprehensive, Australian roleplaying game. Look out for it soon, *Skyfall* is coming...

Simon, that's great news... what with Skyfall on its way and Unae and Australian Realms already arrived the RPG publishing industry in this great country has never been stronger. Come on Aussie gamers, lets all get behind these home-grown products!

Matthew Pittard
via Internet

Hi, I wrote to you a while ago about the proposed UNAE PBEM game, which I have since learned never eventuated. Oh well. Anyway I just wrote this basically to say that I like the changes you have incorporated into the magazine and hope to see *Shadowrun [Australia]* indeed become a good setting in it's own right. Although there is one thing I would like to see in your magazine... maybe a short blurb on each staff member each issue describing if they roleplay and what games they most frequently play.

Anyway congrats on your new look and I hope to see Unae and Solospace expand and grow. Oh and I still hate *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*.

Matthew, yeah it was sad to see the PBEM idea die, but you can now sate your hunger for more Unae by snapping up a copy of the recently released Unae Book 1: Wair-Rae. Then there will be Unae Book 2: Kalraith and UB3: The Dwarven Citadels. By the way, FASA now has SR Australia slated for 1998!

"All the secrets the elves hold are terrible and foul. If they think they are the masters of Unae then surely this place is hell."

**- Forwao, Elven Chronicle
Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1.**

Sean Mackaay
via Internet

Hi Nick and all the crew at Australian Realms, I hope this arrives in time to be in the latest issue. Australian Realms is a magazine that I would go out of my way to buy. The artwork on the cover is (as a general rule) incredible as is the rest of the magazine. But sadly nothing is perfect and this includes Australian Realms. The new SolSpace setting is reasonable but I can't actually see myself using it in a campaign. The A-Team was hilarious, every now and then an issue would come out that was boring but there was always the A-Team to make it more interesting and then you went and killed them off, how could you? Couldn't you pray to Shannafria to bring them back to life. Next, what happened to Card Magic? When it was around I absolutely loathed it but now that it's gone I miss it. Sob.

Talking about cards, I am starting a card magazine. It's called *The Knowledge Vault*. It is not going to have deck ideas or combos to use but instead it's going to be a magazine for debate. People send in pieces on the current topic. The topic for

the first three issues is that "Magic is DYING!". It costs two dollars an issue and all submissions/requests for information should be sent to: The Knowledge Vault, 234A High St. Fremantle WA 6160. Great mag, keep up the good work!

Sean, your fervent prayers to that shameless goddess, Shannafria, will be answered! "The Adventures of The A-Team" will be back next issue. Here's what the exalted Keeper of the Manuals had to say when he heard this very disturbing news: "Everyone make a 'system shock' roll for me!"



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REALMS INVADES THE UNITED STATES

"The Aussies are coming! The Aussies are coming!" Naah, we're just breathing heavy, chuckys and chuckettes. But it is true that as of now *Australian Realms* is back on sale in the United States, all thanks to our new agent over there, Gold Rush Games, PO Box 2531, Elk Grove, CA 95759-2531. Ph/Fax (916) 684 9443.

GOLD RUSH GAMES

"Who are these guys? I've never heard of them." With any luck, this time next year no one in the gaming community will be saying that about *Gold Rush Games*. The small California based (USA) publisher is responsible for such products as *Cyberpunk: Night City Trax* (a licensed audio cassette featuring 10 original instrumentals) and the *Heroic Adventures* product line containing adventures for use with the *Hero System*.

In addition to publishing licensed Hero books, GRG has also acquired a license to produce the *Usagi Yojimbo RPG* (due out this December), based on the comic of the same name by award winner Stan Sakai. Next summer will also see the release of *Sengoku: Chambara Roleplaying* in Fuedal Japan, an exciting samurai RPG!

For more information about Gold Rush Games, check out their web site at <http://members.aol.com/goldrushg/index.htm>.

MAGIC THE GATHERING CD-ROM

"Microprose, is proud to announce the release of *Magic the Gathering* for the IBM PC and compatibles, the first interactive, multi-player on-line computer game based on the award winning and top selling fantasy card game."

This game has been a long time in the making, but apparently really picked up momentum once Sid Meier, designer of *Civilization*, became involved. We're told that the game has several features that will appeal to both card players and players of computer rpgs. Card players can test themselves against the computer AI or over a modem against human opponents selecting from an array of decks drawn from the basic set and four expansion sets. This in itself will make the CD-Rom appealing, but the main attraction is a fantasy roleplay adventure where your character is an inexperienced planeswalker who travels the lands of Dominia challenging other wizards to duels for ante (a new card to add to your deck). As your character wins these duels his library of spells grows, gaining him/her power and ever greater challenges.

It all sounds like great fun to play and, with all that fantastic card at their disposal, it should look out of this world!

Scott Millard of Australian distributor *SegaOzisoft* assures us that the game will be on sale in computer retailers and specialist card and hobby shops downunder much the same time as this issue of *Realms* comes out. So check it out. We'll have a review for you next issue.

Contact: *SegaOzisoft*, Locked Bag 7, Rosebery, NSW 2018. Ph: (02) 317 0000, Fax: (02) 317 0010.

UNREAL ESTATES

Just as Adam was bemoaning the lack of Australian-made gaming stuff we got our hands on a colour flyer from *Unreal Estates* who "design, manufacture and wholesale Australian-made wargaming scenery. Unreal scenery is aimed predominantly at the 25mm market, for such games as *Warhammer 40K*, *Fantasy* and *Warzone*."

The photos in the brochure showing hills, rivers, and buildings look excellent and the prices compare very favourably with similar imported gear. Check out your local retailer for *Unreal Scenery* or else contact Tim Sleigh: *Unreal Estates*, PO Box 256, Kippax, ACT, 2615. Ph: (06) 258 3470 Fax: (06) 259 2328. Email: D.Sleigh@canberra.dialix.oz.au

STARBASE PERTH

The *Science Fiction Club of W.A.* meets on the third Saturday of every month in the auditorium of Homebase Expo Wembley, 6pm - 10.45pm. The club, as well as supplying a regular newsletter, a "staple diet of *Babylon 5* and various *Star Trek* shows", and discounts at supporting retailers also does quite a bit of charity work. *Starbase Perth*, PO Box 614, Morley WA 6943 Ph (09) 276 2739.

DUNKELZAHN DEAD

Shortly after FASA's announcement at *GenCon 96* of Dunkelzahn's victory in the *Shadowrun* election for UCAS president came the startling news that his car was nuked out of existence by person or persons unknown. Scarey stuff, and pretty bold given the number of real life explosions detonated in the US recently. FASA say they had heaps of fun giving away "chunks of Dunk" (little bags of Dunkelzahn's ashes) at the *GenCon* stand.

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What happens next? We'll have to wait and see what develops, but the one piece of bittersweet news we do have is that the accepted *Shadowrun Australia* sourcebook has been put back until 1998 partially to make way for a possible *Shadowrun trading card game* in 1997!

IN NOMINE AT LAST!

This we have to take on as a matter of faith (pun intended). *In Nomine*, Steve Jackson Games' new roleplaying game of angels and demons in a perpetual battle for the future of mankind, was originally due out in 1995 but got bumped by the release of the hugely successful *Illuminati New World Order* trading card game. According to the latest press release the game will be out in November and will be a whole new system (although GURPS conversion notes will be included).

Says Steve Jackson: "Some people are saying that roleplaying is on the way out but I think it's just a matter of finding the right game to capture players' imaginations again. *In Nomine* is perfect for the job, and we look forward to kicking off an entire roleplaying line with its release."

HOWLING KITSCH!

As ever White Wolf Game Studio continues to churn out some excellent support products for their impressive *World of Darkness* games. But some of the more obscure delights (so described because I don't believe we've had the pleasure in Australia) that fans might like to chase up are as follows:

First off there's the *Deluxe Ankh Necklace*, "this gothic treasure will complement any wardrobe"... so long as it's all black? Next comes *Individual Cloisonne Pins*, there are twelve adorned with clan symbols from *Vampire* and one *Werewolf* pin. Finally, look out for *Wraith Dice* whose "glow-in-the-dark numbers radiate on the dice's obsidian surface". These dice were made for the afterlife so that you can roleplay being dead.

Wraith: The Oblivion has recently entered a second edition and the word from retailers is it's selling better now they've included a crossover setting for high-dark-fantasy roleplaying. Dead cool.

CONVENTIONS

This is a bizarre announcement given our largely Australian audience, but I did say we'd promo any con whose organisers make the effort to post us a press release... **Noahcon**, April 26-27 1997, is set to be one of Northern Ohio's biggest hobby events (Warhammer, AD&D, LARP, Magic the Gathering etc.).

Contact: Jack Palur, Matrix Games, Ph/Fax (216) 949 5787.

Conquest 97, the Melbourne based Easter gaming con will be hosting special guests Michael and Lisa Pondsmith of R.Talsorian Games. Lisa may be staging one of their famous *Castle Falkenstein* inspired freeform Norton's Balls. Another event planned is a demonstration of Pinnacle Entertainment Group's recently released *Dead Lands RPG*. All Australian Realms knows about this game is that it has generated a lot of noise on the Internet .frp newsgroups. Should be interesting.

Contact: Garry Fay, Conquest 97, Ph/Fax (03) 9758 9097.

WELCOME BACK, GLORANTHA

In the earliest era of roleplaying there were three really big fantasy campaign settings - Gary Gygax's *Greyhawk*, Dr Barker's *Empire of the Petal Throne*, and Greg Stafford's *Glorantha*. The depth and scope of all three were impressive but sadly all three have pretty much faded into obscurity under the hot glare of such new chums as the *Warhammer World*, *Forgotten Realms*, *Barsaive* and *Unae*. Thus, it was great to hear Chaosium announce a number of new products and spin-off's based on *Glorantha*. Stratelibri, an Italian game manufacturer, has been licensed to publish a range of games and game-related materials beginning with tabletop miniatures. Two rule sets are planned for release mid-1997, for skirmish (25mm) and mass combat (15mm). The first year's schedule includes six *Glorantha* army books. In addition, Chaosium will be producing new *Glorantha* fiction and RPG lines.

Could *Glorantha* retake the crown?

ARE YOU READY TO DREAM?



Mythos: The Dreamlands is due out in January 1997 and is a limited edition collectible card game which can be played either as a stand-alone or as an expansion of the existing *Mythos* card game. The *Dreamlands* version takes the players on journeys into the fantastic lands of dream where unspeakable nightmares lurk ready to steal away your sanity. The 200 card set comes in 60 card starters (including one double-sided Investigator card) and 13 card boosters featuring art by Anson Maddocks, Mark Poole, Douglas Schuler, Scott M. Fisher and many more.

A WORLD IS BORN

Out now from Australian Realms, *Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1* is the very first *Unae* sourcebook. It tells the story of the elves of *Wair-Rae* who are driven by the ambition of mad High King Caemarou to achieve the prophesy of the *Ansilsae*, a ten-thousand year old divine promise that the elves will inherit this world and ascend to paradise... over the millions of dead of all the other races of *Unae*.

Suitable for all fantasy roleplaying games, *Wair-Rae* marks the start of a new era in Australian RPG publishing. YES!

THAT WAS THE NEWS

REVIEWS

GURPS GOBLINS

GURPS Game Supplement

Steve Jackson Games

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

As a reviewer you can sometimes run out of superlatives when describing products you really like. **GURPS Goblins** is just such a product, a game using Steve Jackson Games' tried and true universal RPG system to propagate a madcap campaign world focused in a humorously skewed Georgian London which is populated exclusively by "goblins"; creatures shaped by their life experiences (literally) who are really just grotesquely misshapen humans behaving badly. Thus I want to talk to you about this masterpiece on three levels; as an beautiful artifact, as an engaging read, and as a great fun game.

Firstly, then, *GURPS Goblins* looks gorgeous. It's mostly full colour and Guy Burwell's art, from front cover painting (now adorning this issue of *Realms*) to all the full and two colour illustrations liberally sprinkled throughout this book's 144 pages, is decorous and functional, as all RPG art should be. Burwell has illustrated the cruelly humorous tone of this setting perfectly. The cartoon exaggerations of the goblin characters erupt from a incisive mind's eye that obviously sees people as they really are... warts and all. They made me laugh, and they inspired many possible plots to delight my players with.

Secondly, this book is a hoot to read. The writing style of authors Malcolm Dale and Klaude Thomas strikes an exquisite balance of flourish, verve and shocking understatement that had me wetting myself laughing! Where *Castle Falkenstein* (a game setting that covers some of the same fertile 19th century ground) might be described as echoes of Jules Vern, A. Conan Doyle and H.G. Wells, *GURPS Goblins* reverberates with guffaws inspired by Dickens, Thackeray and Stern. As with all in the GURPS series this book is made up of the core text where the main themes, background and rules of the setting are explained

supported by neat side bar text that give extra colour and subsidiary detail. Meat and potatoes gaming material sweetened by a rich sauce. Plenty to sate any gaming group's appetite for adventure and laughs.

Thirdly, I come to *GURPS Goblins* as a gaming experience, which is wildly hilarious. The players begin as goblins of low station struggling to survive the vicissitudes of life in a hostile urban environment, all with the in-game goals of climbing the social ladder (increasing social status) and having a damn good time doing it (acquiring the money you need to spend on having a good time and so proving your higher station is an endless source of mischief and misadventure in itself). Reduced to this, it doesn't sound very exciting, but the world that Dale and Thomas have created is so brilliantly funny, so outlandish and yet familiar, so bestial that you'd have to be as humourless as John Howard not to have a good time playing in it. And you are guaranteed to have a good time, the rules demand it.

The rules encourage the referee to make life interesting for the players, placing them centre stage in a weird and wonderful wasteland of rollicking taverns, richly appointed drawing rooms, exclusive clubs, odiferous fish markets, beggar-infested streets, ratty sewers, bizarre public hangings (where the condemned's stylish exit is his one consolation), the whole crowded bustle of a marvellously anachronistic 1830's metropolitan London populated by a cast of thousands of colourful NPCs. Life is never dull for goblins.

Character death looms in a variety of unfair and unsavoury ways - physical violence, disease, gross inebriation, the justice system, acts of god - but goblins prove to be near indestructible. The combat system is very cinematic and referees are encouraged to use descriptions reminiscent of the angst generated by *Hol's* pain levels and *Lunch Money's* playground teeth-graters. Then there's "goblin luck", a game mechanism that ensures that the referee can be unjust to the players with complete impartiality.

Goblin luck, "the attentions of god", treats with player characters as if it were an NPC; in any given situation where the players are trying to achieve something you may make a roll on the NPC Reaction table to see how the fates react, and then roleplay the resulting events accordingly - hostile or friendly. Goblin indestructibility coupled with goblin luck and the berserk setting make playing this game a Hansom cab roller-coaster ride of Dickensian delights.

Thumbs up!

EUROSOURCE PLUS

Cyberpunk sourcebook

R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Paul Mitting

Another well presented sourcebook to add to the ever growing pile of *CP2020* material. You can't complain that RTG don't support their product - and nearly all of it is good quality stuff. This latest product re-visits the European world of 2020 in the style so successfully used in their *Pacific Rim* sourcebook.

Contained in the 144 pages are a wealth of hard facts plus some useful insights into life of the modern Europeans. As per *Pacific Rim* you get general overview material plus a country by country run down. This stuff is good, although a bit sparse on many of the countries. Germany gets a good look in here, with France and Scandinavia getting a fair share also. I often wonder what gamers who live there think of it all. I remember being quite amused to discover that in 2020 Arasaka have their Western Australian Headquarters about 2km from my house. I hope the property values improve.

The UK gets a shorter coverage than you might expect, but the *Rough Guide to the UK* sourcebook gives you nearly everything thing you would need anyway. That brings me to another point, which is that this source material only runs up to 2020. (*Rough Guide* goes to 2022).

Some of the factions who run the place are covered also, in particular the Goldenkids. These are the wealthy super elite who plot, scheme, fight and generally make Europe their personal playground. Plot hooks fair leaped off the page as I read this stuff, as the 'kids always ensure they use others to do their dirty work for them.

Finally, I must mention some of the subcultures that get described. Favourites were the Hooligans (who train their

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REALMS

Wair-Rae



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UNAE BOOK ONE BY COLIN TABER

members to ensure maximum carnage at the match), Vlads (who dress in dark capes and have cyberware to give them that vampiric touch) and the Templars. Templars are medieval reenactors who relive older times. Since this is something I do myself quite regularly, I got a real kick out of seeing them in 2020.

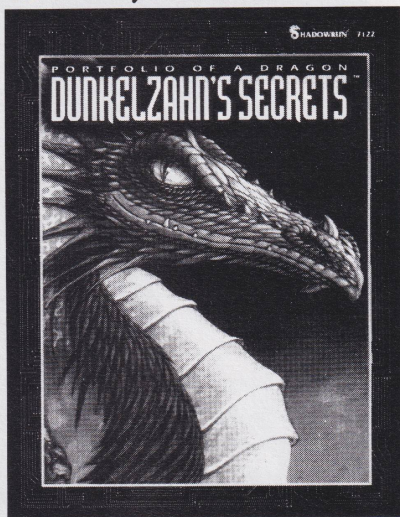
In summary, a comprehensive and useful book.

PORTFOLIO OF A DRAGON: DUNKELZAHN'S SECRETS

Shadowrun Adventure Supplement

FASA Corporation

Reviewed by Dan Gilbert



Dunkelzahn gets assassinated on his inauguration night! Great start to a political career, albeit a very short one. Must be something about American politics - they always kill their presidents.

This supplement is essentially one giant set of adventure hooks, all keyed around the death of the dragon Dunkelzahn and the execution of his last will and testament. The will itself makes a fun read, especially if you can pick up on the "in jokes" and references. Backing that are suggested adventure ideas regarding the will, and people, and powers that may be involved. There are a couple of more detailed adventure ideas provided, plus a short story which could be used as the basis for an adventure. These would need a lot of work, I reckon, to be made into ready to run scenarios.

The death of the dragon itself is of course shrouded in mystery, and there are conflicting reports as to what really happened. I suspect this is to leave the way open for the return of big D at a later stage. In fact, much of the truth behind the rumours and events is left up to the referee's discretion. It gives you a pretty

free hand to take the hooks presented and work them whichever way suits your own campaign. A novel approach, but I hope that later releases don't rely on the stuff given here except in a general way.

Text is well written, with the usual shadowtalk interspersing it. Illustrations range from decent to very poor - I think FASA should consider paying the art guys a little more. To sum it up, it makes a good read and offers some good *Shadowrun* insights, but is not ready to play material. On the other hand, it is a great source of ideas to build into your own campaign or even base a whole new one. It's a kind of 50/50 deal.

THE BOOK OF SIGILS

Castle Falkenstein Supplement

R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

For those of you that play the *Castle Falkenstein* game and have the urge to dabble in all things magical - your prayers are answered with this release. With thirty new Sorcerous Orders detailed, and thirty-six new Sorcerous Lorebooks (with enough new spells to keep even Wilson the Mage happy), this supplement is packed with useful material, for Hosts and players alike.

Unlike the previous two supplements (*Steam Age*, *Comme Il Faut*), **The Book of Sigils** more closely follows the CF rulebook, in that the hard gaming information is held together by a framing story; in this case, the tale of rogue sorcerer Anthony Savile. Throughout his long and varied career, Savile rises from being a relatively minor player in the theatrical Order of the Cup and Wands to be the most hunted (and probably talented) sorcerer of his age. Savile, you see, has broken one of the major rules of Falkenstein magic - he learns too much.

And it is Savile's story that really elevates this product. While the relative ease with which Savile moves from Sorcerous Order to the next is, on occasion, just a little bit too convenient (let's just call it dramatic license), each change does flow on quite nicely from the previous and in no way spoils the excitement of the story. While the adventure itself is certainly entertaining (novel next please, RTG), its strength for me is in the way it provides a real example of how it feels to be a sorcerer in the world of Castle Falkenstein. From the use of appropriate dialogue, to Victorian

xenophobic attitudes, to simple location descriptions, *The Book of Sigils* brings this setting to life. I would certainly have far less concerns running a campaign (especially one involving Sorcerous Orders) after reading this supplement.

As well as providing background information on the various sorcerous orders, the *Book of Sigils* also gives us a good glimpse of the rest of the CF campaign setting. Throughout his career, Anthony Savile journeys all over the globe, visiting New Europa, Africa, the Americas, China, and even Australia (albeit briefly). The supplement also contains some nicely dark elements too, with a serial killer, zombies, assassination attempts and fanatical cultists all putting in appearances, demonstrating that a "Dramatic Entertainment" doesn't always have to be filled with swashing buckles.

Players who wish to play CF Sorcerers will now have a hard choice to make when it comes to aligning themselves to an Order. All of the Orders presented here have their own strengths and weaknesses, from powerful spells to powerful enemies. Potential power gamers need to be wary though - attempting to reproduce the experiences of Anthony Savile would be a very risky endeavour indeed, and Hosts are given plenty of ammunition (and some helpful role-playing suggestions) with which to beat down their over ambitious players.

I simply loved this book and consider it an essential purchase for Hosts and players. Clearly the best release for Castle Falkenstein since the original rules.

ATLAS OF THE YOUNG KINGDOMS Vol 1: The

Northern Continent

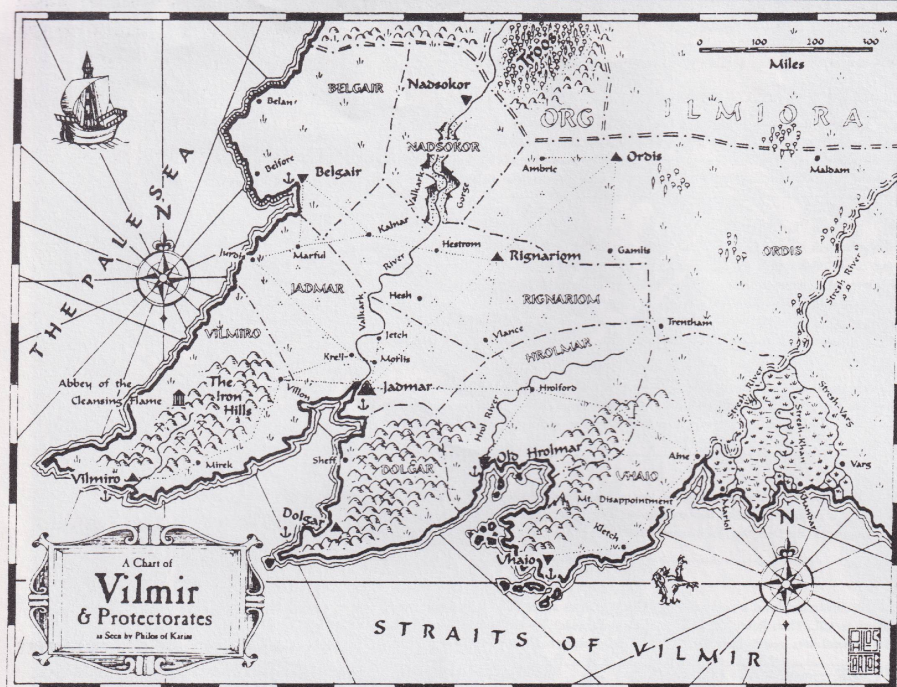
Elric! Supplement

Chaosium Inc

Reviewed by Paul "Halfdan" Mitting

The revamp of the old *Stormbringer* game into the newer *Elric!* was perhaps one of my most feared gaming events. I started my gaming career on this old wonder, and I always dreaded it becoming some dark, *Vampire*-esque diceless mish mash. That never happened, and the new *Elric!* is very good.

In particular, great effort has gone into turning out new game supplements like this one. This 144 page book covers the young nations of Vilmar and Ilmar, the haunted lands of Org and the Forest of Troos, the eternally rain-drenched Weeping



Wastes, cesspit Nadsokor, the desolate Sighing Desert and of course legendary Tanelorn. This coverage alone makes the book worthwhile, but also thrown in are legends of the creation of the world, a summarised history and the local calendars that mark the passing of days before cataclysm (the disastrous denouement of the *Elric* saga).

Richard Watts (Aussie!) gives each place comprehensive coverage; History, Special Places, Society (what the inhabitants look and dress like, common names, government, justice, food and drink etc.), and people (NPCs) of note. One feature handy for those who favour gaming in the years leading up to the world's end is a summary of events right up to the battles with Chaos; even the deaths of notable NPC's are recorded. Nice to know that the swine who hired your character gets his chips in the end.

Presentation is solid, with well written and printed text and maps worth drooling over (for example, see the map of Vilmir shown above), but otherwise the interior artwork is functional yet rarely inspired -- you can't have everything, I guess.

This would have to rate as an essential product for the *Elric!* gamer. For others, its well detailed nations and lands would be useful to referees needing a country to visit at short notice, or somewhere "different" work into their own campaign. For this reason I imagine *Planescape* players would find it useful also, with NPC stats the only thing needing reworking. Good stuff.

THE WORLD OF ADEN

MasterBook / D6 Game Supplement
West End Games

Reviewed by Paul Mitting

The cover of this world book tells me it is based on the hit computer roleplaying game series by SSI. Not being familiar with the games, I went into Aden without any prior expectations.

What I found was a real grab bag of concepts, races, magic and technology. All the classic fantasy races are there, with a few new ones just for variety. They have magic like most fantasy worlds, but they also have a new twist with Mechamagic. This is the merging of magic with mechanisms to produce animated artifacts or devices which are far more powerful than their level of technology would allow. As a consequence, they have armoured war mechs (like *BattleTech*, but steam powered), huge armed land trains for cargo carrying, and my favourite - artificial limbs and organs which are stronger and faster than mere human ones. In effect, mechemagic cyborgs.

Of course, with all these goodies for players to muck about with there has to be a down side. It is a pretty major one. You see, 10 years ago the world of Aden was somehow infested with foul, destructive creatures called Nocturnals. Driven by unknown forces, these creatures are everywhere across the lands and seas, and they are very deadly. They come in a variety of shapes and powers, and all are inimical to human life. Thus the world

has been under siege for the last 10 years, and it is not the friendly happy place it used to be.

The mix of powerful enemies and extensive weapons and magic for the players means an action packed game I'm sure. The biggest let down I felt was that the game writer has tried to cram too much stuff into one package, thereby glossing over a lot of material. Many of the country and place descriptions could have done with a more extensive coverage, as could the varied races which inhabit them. As a setting for endless warfare it is good, but I think serious roleplayers will not find the depth they need without lots of work. Stats are provided for the *Masterbook* and the new D6 system. With a little tinkering, a referee could adapt much of what is presented to his own preferred system.

I suspect that the wealth of ideas and magic/technology presented here will appeal to the hordes of "power gamers", so it may be successful. If you're looking for a detailed world to roam in, however, I'd recommend the *Elric!!* books instead.

THE LOST NOTEBOOKS OF LEONARDO DI VINCI

Castle Falkenstein supplement
R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

Castle Falkenstein fans would know the importance of this tome to the world of New Europa. With it, Rhyme the Enginemaster was able to create the impressive Bayernese Aeronavy, which turned the tide of battle at Königseig. In this codex, Leonardo Da Vinci's notes on the secret and use of sorcerous automata are revealed to all.

Insightful chap Leonardo. In the space of seven productive years, Da Vinci creates plans for record players, tanks, televisions, computers, weather machines, a refrigerator (including a cute little argument about why the light only comes on when you open the door...), invisibility suits, destruction engines, earthquake machines, dimensional portals - the list goes on. Most are illustrated, and in a manner comparable to other Da Vinci sketches you may have seen, providing an authentic feel to the book. This is intentional, so that Hosts can hand their Dramatic Characters copies of pages of the Codex (as they find or steal them), so that they can try to create their own sorcerous
(Reviews continued on page 36)

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A high quality role playing magazine that is produced right here in Australia, in Perth. A bi-monthly publication that has already seen 15 issues, it contains 48 A4 pages and a full color cover. It reviews new products, a regular section on PBM games, book reviews, a brief overview of new products from a host of suppliers, and lots of scenarios, adventures, short stories or source material for many different role playing games, including ShadowRun, AD&D, Cyberpunk, Mage, Earthdawn, Traveller, Vampire, as well as popular board games and miniatures games, such as BattleTech, Space Marine, Warhammer 40,000, etc. etc.

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Avalon Hill's great publication that deals exclusively with Avalon Hill simulations (what a surprise!). Each issue highlights a specific (usually new) product, with extensive feature articles. However a selection of popular games (such as ASL, Third Reich, Diplomacy etc) are also regularly covered in detail. Article definition includes series replays scenarios, designer's notes, strategy & tactics, optional rules, coming attractions & (infrequently) variant counters. Good publication regularity.

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BattleTechnology magazine has been canned by FASA, and we have been looking for a magazine to replace it. And this magazine fits the job description perfectly. The magazine features scenarios, variants, army lists, and model building tips for the following miniatures' games: Warzone, Warhammer 40,000, BattleTech, Heavy Gear, Warhammer Fantasy Battle, etc. 64 pages. First issue due August. BattleTechnology subscribers will be sent this magazine.

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We've been looking for a top quality magazine on Japanese anime and manga ever since *Animag* disappeared forever. We have found one! *Protocolculture Addicts* is brought out bimonthly - there have already been 29 issues. It is produced by *Janus Publications*, the people who have given us *Heavy Gear Fighter*. This magazine reviews all things to do with anime: games, CDs, cartoons, books, manga, and videos. It has full features covering anime movies & videos, with episode by episode descriptions; anime stories, etc. Profusely illustrated with shots from videos, etc.

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Steve Jackson's new bi-monthly role playing magazine. It is 72 pages in length, and features reports on overseas cons, reviews hot selling games, such as Earthdawn, contains scenarios and designer's notes on things such as GURPS, Car Wars, Toon, etc. It also has many regular features such as Steve Jackson's games news and release schedule, industry news, AADA news, etc. It also contains some rather tongue in cheek rip offs of other games. For example, they are running a series of Toon supplements, such as: Hampshire: The Masked Ace Raid, and coming is Werecow: Ah, Pork Lips, Gee, which games are they ripping off?

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WHITE DWARF

White Dwarf magazine has entered an entirely new format. Its now a 100 pages containing news, rules, and battle reports for all the latest releases from Games Workshop and Citadel, with tactics articles, painting and modelling articles, interviews, army features, plus every issue will now contain two sheets of card gaming "hardware" that you can cut out and use in your games. Wargear cards, data faxes etc are now available in top quality glossy cardboard! Note that Military Simulations often puts Games Workshop/Citadel discount vouchers with this magazine, redeemable only at Military Simulations.

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6/11

COME ONE, COME ALL

An Unae adventure set in Wair-Rae by Colin Taber

Come in, Come in! Take a seat by Old Teeth there. No, no he's not here yet, but don't worry he will be soon enough. Do you want a drink? It's half an hour before sunset you know, he'll be here within the hour, just sit back and relax. Enjoy the sunset across Finsilsa Lake. You're from out of town, right? Well, you'll never have seen anything like a Yamere lakeside sunset. Trust me. Excuse me for a moment here come some more customers...

- Johldae Camoon, innkeeper and brother of Forwao

Now that **Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1** has been released, over the coming issues of *Australian Realms* we will be supplying you with a series of adventure scenarios and support articles so that you can make the best possible use of the rich source material supplied in that book. Even without *Unae Book 1*, these articles will give you ample background, exciting adventure hooks and story ideas for them to stand alone.

Today we travel to *Merrae's Circle*, a tavern of fine repute for the out-of-towners who come to Yamere, capital of the Fifth Dominion. We detail the establishment and its most famous residents and regulars. We then use the tavern as the stepping stone for an adventure scenario suitable for use with **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons**, **Warhammer Fantasy Role Play** or **GURPS Fantasy**. So, first we're off to the tavern for a quick drink, then we'll be on our way to adventure!

MERRAE'S CIRCLE

This tavern is a home away from home for many of the non-elfen travellers and merchants who find themselves in Yamere. Apart from a small number of rooms that can be let in the Mercantile Mile area it is one of the most foreigner-friendly of elfen establishments. Owned and run by Johldae Camoon, the younger brother of the famous Chronicler and advisor to High King Caemarou, Forwao, it is a remarkable place always full of amazing stories, insidious rumour and juicy gossip.

The tavern takes space in a commercial pillar tower that is built upon the eastern shallows of Lake Finsilsa. It holds the entire tenth level and the western half of the eleventh. Wide balconies ring the tenth floor giving its patrons a good view of the city and its beauty. The tenth level is the tavern area which also includes the kitchen, ale and wine store, and several private lounge rooms which can be hired for parties, meetings and on occasion used as dormitories when the demand is there. Over the fireplace in the main taproom is a portrait of Siverio Merrae as a young man wielding the magic bow for which he is famed and standing astride a *Kalraith Dragon* (see issue 17) he is reputed to have slain with it. The tavern's area in the eleventh level is solely used for accommodation, with twelve rooms sleeping two, six sleeping four and two dormitory rooms which both can hold a dozen. Both levels also have toilets, the eleventh level having a bathing room. Access to the tavern is by the central stairwell that spirals up the middle of the pillar tower, or the two Cabal-created magical lift shafts which are both constantly attended by apprentices who control the movements of the lift discs.

The twenty-level pillar tower holds a huge variety of other small businesses and homes. Although originally the property of House Annomora, no single family or merchant concern dominates the building any more. House Annomora was stripped of its titles and much of its possessions by High King Caemarou after the "uncovering" of a conspiracy hatched by that once noble house to poison High Queen Caree Jenn. The pillar tower is now owned by the House of the High King, Quor Budasa, and most of the tenants live there rent free. Each has their own ties to the Royal House through services rendered or the call of a blood bond. In any case, the pillar tower and its residents are their own happy community and all loyal to the crown.

THE CAMOON BROTHERS

The two brothers are very quiet about their own family, no-one at the tavern knowing the details of their family's past. Annually the two leave Yamere for a couple of weeks during which time they return home, where it is and who exactly they are visiting is not known.

Forwao is well known in his dual roles as advisor to High King Caemarou, and as the current Chronicler of the Fifth Dominion (see *Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1*). The one hundred and seventy five year old elf spends the vast majority of his time travelling and investigating various matters in the service of the High King. He also spends a good deal of his time keeping the *Wair-Rae Chronicle*; Forwao has offices close to the royal court in the Pasinotis pillar tower where these records are stored and maintained by a small but devoted staff of two dozen clerks and officials plus a number of menial scribes from the underclass, including one Flet! That Forwao is able to inveigle a human into such important service show two things about this remarkable man - his power within Yamere and his tolerance for non-elves.

Whenever in Yamere, Forwao stays at *Merrae's Circle*, being given a private room next to his younger brother's. Generally he will stay at the tavern for only a week at a time, his travel schedule is so demanding that such a break is all that can be allowed for. Forwao tries to spend a good deal of his free time with his brother and speaking to the tavern's guests. Forwao is a great storyteller and very charismatic. He has travelled widely and considers his greatest skill the ability to gather information, even if it be from as unlikely a source as a half drunk seaman holding up the bar of *Merrae's Circle*.

Johldae is one hundred and seventy years old and, like his older brother, has travelled extensively, accompanying Forwao on his longest journey to the distant lands of Prabeq and Hindia some seven years ago. Johldae is very comfortable, having made a small fortune years ago during his decades of travel. Some of this money has been invested in *Merrae's Circle*, the other portion is securely stored at a location or investments known only to Johldae and possibly, Forwao.

Johldae considers managing the tavern as a kind of early retirement, as a way to keep in touch with what is happening in Yamere, while still getting information, stories and entertainment from the many travellers who pass through his doors. If anything, Johldae is the less gregarious of the two brothers, but only marginally.



THE REGULARS

Bear is a Flet human who is an escaped slave from the docklands. He had done stevedoring work on the dockside for the Silvana House, but fled after being framed for the failure of a family venture by the young of the house that cost a good amount of coin and honour. It seemed a flogging and then *the Arena* was to be his lot, so given the opportunity he bolted, and was taken in by the sympathetic Johldae who uses him to serve at the bar, and works his big frame by having him handle security when the occasional argument gets out of hand.

Romai Kandro is an old Heletian human from Lixus who has lived a long life full of travel and adventure. If asked, he will say one adventure too many. Something terrible occurred in his recent past, something that has shattered his nerve and sent him fleeing from the wilds of Burvoy to the safe city of Yamere where he lives modestly on the wealth that a contract with a publisher (Kramer Press) in the Kramer Confederation to write his memoirs into a book supplies him. Previously he was a skilled horseman and talented in the use of the sword and bow, but his flight from Burvoy cost him his left arm which was severed at the shoulder. Now he seems to live for good company, drink and little else.

Romai's most treasured possession is an ogre three-handed sword that he "acquired" during his adventures in Burvoy.

Gunther Gross is the Flet scribe lucky enough to have escaped the virtual slavery of work in the employ of the merchant house, Jilbae Kala. This escape occurred when Forwao plucked him from Jilbae Kala's rough grasp after the Executioner's Guild handed in their damning report on that house's activities to High King Caemarou. Gunther works during the day in Forwao's office of the Chronicle. Although not officially allowed access to the pillar tower, Forwao often smuggles Gunther into Merrae's Circle for the evening where he has been hired by Romai Kandro to transcribe that maimed adventurer's dictated memoirs.

Despite his now having a much gentler master, Gunther still grates at the way the elves treat him and his kind as chattel and his long talks with Romai Kandro in a private booth at Merrae's Circle have only filled him with a renewed lust for freedom.

Teeth is an almost feral Saldaen. She has a very dark look about her, an aura of darkness (something only exaggerated when she shows her teeth which have all been filed into sharp points). She works at the tavern as a cook, and also finds time to clean the rooms. She speaks little in public, but if in a more private conversation she will tell of the terrible doom of her people, her homeland and her soul. Teeth has fled the civil war in Saldae as she was discovered by her own folk as being an informer for the Heletian forces (see *Australian Realms* issue 22). This exile from her beloved homelands has driven her sanity to breaking point. Only the subdued routine of the tavern keeps her under control, but even so her temper occasionally melts through.

Shame is a dwarven gold merchant who has given away his trade and now lives in exile from the Dwarven Citadels of northern Wairanir. Honour is very important to the dwarves of Unae, and Shame will not go by any other name or allow anyone to probe the truth of his past. Whether he is running from assassins, or actually living out an honour-bound sentence of exile is not known. A rumour had been passed around the tavern that his dispute had something to do with the ruling clan of the biggest citadel in the north, whether true or not is not known, and may never be known.

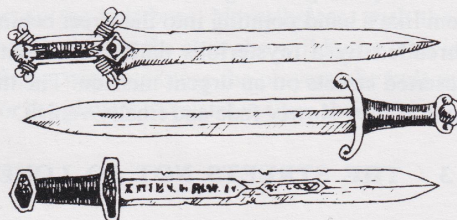
Abdan is an old Prabesk human trader who has retired from his working life to travel before returning to Belmez, Evora to settle down. He has resided at Merrae's Circle for two seasons, using it as a base to see Yamere and some of the other nearby pillar cities.

This is actually a front. Abdan is really an old slave of the Fiquene House who have sent him to Yamere to spy on Forwao (when he is staying there). His main goals are to pass on any relevant information Forwao lets slip (especially any information from the High King's council), but also to observe him and try and deduce where Forwao and Johldae actually come from. The House Camoon is not known in Wair-Rae, and the Fiquene's are concerned that he is actually a part of a rival House who have cleverly disguised him as a commoner in an attempt to manipulate the High King.

THE ANNOMORAE

The Annomoraes are today based in Rumaza and having been stripped of their noble titles are now considered merely a merchant house. Dealing mainly in the illicit magic trade it is widely rumoured in the shadowy world of Yamere's criminal community that the House had hidden many treasures within the walls and floors of their Yamere properties prior to them being stripped of denounced by High King Caemarou. The rumour is backed up by two known raids by agents in the Annomoraes' pay who have attempted to break into private sections of the pillar tower. The pillar tower that houses Merrae's Circle is only one of three large old Annomoraes properties that are said to hide such treasures.

Meanwhile in Rumaza, where the House is rebuilding its fortune, talk has been heard of subversively gaining back the old assets of the family, and finally the noble titles. It would seem that High King Caemarou has made a very determined enemy.





NOW, THE ADVENTURE !

Referees are encouraged to use the background material supplied in last issue's *Yamere* article plus the information provided here as starting points for their own adventures in Wair-Rae. The sourcebook, *Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1*, provides many more insights into Wair-Rae and the elves, and this background plus the major storylines therein will be complemented by the adventures we print over the next issues of Australian Realms.

This issue's adventure starts in the environs of the Merrae's Circle Tavern, in the lift shaft of the pillar tower in fact:

SCENE 1 - A FRIEND OF TETERI

After a night's carousing at the Merrae's Circle tavern and your player characters go to leave, they see the lift disc attendant (an apprentice cabalist) waiting for an old robed elf to get onto the disc, and preparing to make the descent to the ground level. Seeing the players the apprentice asks them if they want to go down. Once at ground level he waits for the robed figure to leave the disc, before answering the ring of a gong from one of the levels above. The players make their way to either their lodgings (if not staying at Merrae's Circle), the Avenue of Magic, or one of the night time markets (wherever they are going in fact!). At first they don't notice, but finally it becomes impossible to not notice, around very bend in the road, leaning against the opening of every alley is the same robed figure they saw at the disc lift. The faded grey and dirty robes are worn and carry distinguishing stains, it is the same old elf, his face most hidden at every turn.

SCENE 2 - THE MOON SO BIG

When the characters investigate the sadly neglected figure they find a very pale (perhaps deathly so) skinned elf who has an almost ethereal look about him, the full moon's beams piercing through his thin robes. He tries to answer their questions but cannot be heard; whenever he opens his mouth instead of his voice a chill breeze blows, howling shrilly through the towers of the pillar city. Any player touching the figure can feel nothing but icy air, the old man has no physical form. The desperation and pain in the old elf's eyes say it all. Slowly some words can perhaps be discerned from the wind, they are; "*Dragged from rest...*", "*Forced to...*", "*Naskae stolen...*", "*Doomed forever...*" and "*My House of Jenn will be shamed...*".

As the anguished man slowly starts to disperse like a thick mist torn by wind the players feel their heads spin, their hearts warm and their weapons grow light and welcomed. The mist rushes past them like a hand pointing into the street behind them, only to be shredded by a mysterious dark coach that rushes through the deserted streets on an urgent mission. The tatters of mist following it as they slowly fade and finally vanish.

SCENE 3 - THE STREETS NOT SO LONELY

The coach is made of black aspen timber, the only markings on its dark exterior being that of a large purple square on each of the bottom halves of the coach's two doors. The lamps at the front of the coach are hooded by skulls, probably human.

The giddy sensation your players feel is the blessing of the old elf's spirit. Anyone who takes steps to follow the coach is rewarded with a doubling of the blessing the spectral elf has already imparted to the players. Any player who hesitates or talks negatively of such pursuit can feel the warm glow of the blessing fade quickly, only to leave an empty chill.

If your game system doesn't have a specific blessing then give the players a bonus two additional dice, +2 or +10% for any of the actions they take in helping solve the mystery.

SCENE 4 - THE DEAD MAN'S DREAM

After spending the rest of the night trying to follow and then locate the elusive and quick travelling coach which swiftly disappears in the Old Yamere district the players return to their inn and bed. In a dream dominated by a deep purple sky and a blood-soaked ground, skulls laugh at the players, only to leave them and attack another form, the spirit of the old man. In the dream the skulls fly of their own accord, some human, some elven, some horned, some not. They swoop at the spirit, eventually snatching a blue sphere, the elf's *naskae*, from him. Crying with rage, sadness and then ultimate loss the old elf again disperses, this time for ever, his spirit shattered for eternity.

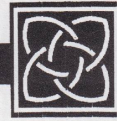
SCENE 5 - THE COACH UNKNOWN

Upon waking in the morning all players individually have vivid visions of corrupt skulls against purple skies and the like to recount. They have been touched by the *Desmorru* (see the *Terura Kala* article in this issue). As they each meet up with the public in the tavern for breakfast or in the markets they will hear reports of the theft of a *naskae* of a recently deceased noble, Old Ares Jenn, from the pillar tower of House Jenn. The House is offering a generous reward (your discretion) for the *naskae*'s return and a smaller reward for any information. Any contact between the Jenn House and the players will be positive as the seers of the House will be able to detect Old Ares Jenn's blessing which while fading still marks and protects the players.

SCENE 6 - PASSAGE TO NOWHERE

The players can search for the coach, but it is unknown and cannot be found. Finally a breakthrough seems apparent when in the markets, streets, taverns or some other crowded place the players catch a sight of a tattooed hand which bares a skull. The hand is quickly covered over by a long rich purple sleeve, and before the players can react, the robed figure is disappearing into the distance through the busy crowd. Following is a long and unsure task; fleeting glimpses of the purple robe tantalise the players as they struggle to push their way through the crowds - not *too* aggressively, though, as laying rough hands on an elf could lead the human players into very deep trouble. The pursuit delivers the them to Old Yamere, and a block of very old, decaying and boarded-up buildings. The streets here are deserted and an uneasy feeling descends on the players.

One of the buildings surprisingly has an unblocked stable with a sturdy and well oiled gate, one player is certain this where the mysterious figure was last seen through the crowds and tight winding streets of Old Yamere.



**SCENE 7 - EMPTY! NOTHING! NONE!**

Opening the door, the stable is empty. Fresh manure and straw show that it has been used, but by whom is unknown. While investigating the stable a sound is heard from a connecting building. A brief glimpse of purple through a boarded window and the players know the mysterious figure has escaped their pursuit into the maze of Old Yamere.

SCENE 8 - THE TAVERN'S ROUND

Back at Merrae's Circle Forwao arrives, being in Yamere for the next four days he has as usual taken up residence of his room at the tavern. If the players do not approach him, and what player would not snatch the opportunity to speak to this most famous of elves, then have Forwao approach them, curious to meet this band of humans. In any case, hearing of the players' current search and involvement in the mysterious ways of the elves Forwao will talk to them about it at length until they speak of the skull and purple symbol from their dreams, visions, the tattoo and the coach. Upon hearing of the symbol he will tell them all he knows of the Desmorru (see the *Terura Kala* article in this issue).

ACT 9 - THE OLD YAMERE EXIT

Forwao suggests that the players watch the stable building in Old Yamere for a couple of nights, saying he has heard of many strange groups and happenings in that old part of the pillar-city.

ACT 10 - THE COACH RETURNS

Near the end of the players' long night watch of the stable the dark coach arrives. It is followed on foot by dozens of robed individuals, many very stealthfully hiding themselves in the old street's shadows. After a few moments all the figures have entered the stables and door has been shut behind them.

ACT 11 - THE TALE OF FLIGHT

Getting into the stable is easy, the building is again empty apart from the two horses and the coach. All the robed figures have disappeared. A diligent search reveals the iron ring pull of a stone trap door that leads to a narrow stair descending underground. Walking through a series of dark passages and small rooms dimly lit by oil lamps which throw disturbing shadows on the walls, the players find themselves at the top of a crooked wooden staircase looking down upon a large vaulted chamber full of robed figures gathered around their kult priest - Amerthae.

In front of the priest is an altar with a body upon it, a body that is robed in what looks to be a burial shroud. The body is twitching under Amerthae's necromantic castings, and before long it sits up. Rising to its feet the corpse lumbers towards the stairs with the priest yelling at it from behind "Lead us to your resting place! Lead us!"

As there are no side passages within the cellars the players will be forced to flee the stumbling corpse and its following procession or be apprehended in this one-way kult warren.

ACT 12 - A TASTE OF SOMETHING EVIL

Your players may be tempted to forcibly intervene at this point. Advise them that although the kultists appear to be only lightly armed (knives and fists) they do greatly outnumber the players, they are led by maniac a kult priest with obvious necromantic talents, and they are all elves - humans are forbidden by elvish law to harm elves whatever the provocation. If the players do not interfere but shadow the kultist's they will be able to watch as the robed corpse is slowly followed by the coach through the quiet back streets of after-midnight Yamere to a pillar tower on the shores of Finsilsa Lake.

Once there the body under the priest's quiet but insistent command will scale the first two floors of the pillar tower with a grim purpose. Aghast, they then see the corpse scratch out its own naskae which adorns the deceased's family-house tower. As the corpse and the naskae return to the ground they are taken into the coach and sped back to the stable in Old Yamere. Once in the stable the corpse is discarded and buried in the soil of the building while the naskae is taken from its hands, a wispy spectral figure can be seen watching the proceedings, one the kultists seem oblivious to.

The kultists take the naskae down to their altar chamber, and place it in the altar's side, to join at least a dozen other soul pearls. Eventually, after concluding a ritual of dedication the kultists disperse, taking the coach and horses too. As they leave the fading spirit of the deceased elf will wave the players in, watching them, hoping they will take the naskae and return them to the various pillar towers they have been stolen from. If they move to do this by removing the naskae from the altar the spirit will dissolve. A feeling of ease will fill all the players as they can realise they have at least undone the commands of betrayal the kult inflicted upon Old Area Jenn. Of course, a reward from House Jenn also awaits.

THE END?

If the players successfully retrieve Old Area Jenn's naskae then House Jenn will be grateful, but the extent of their gratitude will be limited to a business transaction; the player characters are only human after all. Exposing the kult of Desmorru to the authorities will be difficult; the priests of the Kinreda will hardly take the word of a human against that of any elf.

The original kultist who was followed back to the stable by the party is aware of who they are, but will not immediately reveal this as she is afraid Amerthae will punish her for leading the players to the kult base. Nevertheless, with the theft of the dedicated naskae from the altar she will know who is responsible and will find a way to expose the players, the kult will then seek revenge for the players have stolen from their god.

It is Autumn, 516EK



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TERURA KALA

BY COLIN TABER & ADAM WHITT

As unbelievable as it may seem, even the elves suffer the blight and the corruption of the Horned God. To the elves, the sylvan race, the Horned God is known as Terura, and his followers and kults as the Terura Kala. They are like their god, abominations of this and all worlds.

It can be argued (and successfully) that the Horned God or Terura is an elven evil, he is after all the bastard son of part of the elven pantheon. The product of the loveless and spiteful union of Andrasta and Pordanamor, something that will never again happen, but regardless did happen.

Terura is a force that could destroy the elven race, he could destroy all of Unae. Regardless of which of his many names you know him by, Terura, The Horned God, Diablo, Setani and Rutri, he is a threat to us all.

Forwao - Chronicle of New Wair-Rae

It is said that the souls of elves are pure power, that our naskae mark us as the chosen of the gods, and that our passion for life burns the brighter therefore. But all light casts a shadow. The darker facets of the elven soul are represented by Terura, the bastard son of Andrasta and Pordanamor. Those who have faith in Terura believe that they are all the stronger for allowing their dark passions to rule them. Thus there are many kults in Wair-Rae and beyond who worship the Horned God in his many forms, these are the Terura Kala. Some of these kults have equivalents in Heletian and other human lands, when appropriate such links will be mentioned (the article, Kultist!, detailing the major human kults, appeared in issue 15 of *Australian Realms*).

THE TERURA KALA KULTS

Nearly all Terura Kala kults are represented in the elven capital, Yamere. All the major kults of slaughter, murder, pain, theft, lust, undeath, the beast and the moon are known to be active in the pillar-city capital of Wair-Rae. This is something that has disgusted High King Caemerou since his youth and has spurred him on to search out and destroy them. At many meetings of the *Lu Konsenarde* he has repeatedly exhorted his high priests to stamp out these "hell-priests and their vermin".



The far-reaching influence of the kults of Terura (and the Horned God of the Heletians) is such, however, that those authorised by the king to study and destroy the dark faiths have labelled it the *Invisible Empire*. It covers most of Unae. The Dormetian capital of this "empire" huddles within the filthy shadows of Turaso in Greater Baimiopia (see *AR* issue 13). Second only to this seething hive of kultists are the crawling underbellies of Rumaza and Yamere in beloved Wair-Rae.

While the factionalism within Wair-Rae's nobility is clearly defined by a split between Rumaza's House Fiquene and the Royal House Quor Budasa based in Yamere, the Terura Kala's divisions are many; most kults are spiritually opposed to every other kult as well as being up against the Kinreda. The truth is that in corrupt Rumaza the kults find it easier to operate, yet ultimately they aspire to rule from Yamere. Regardless of which city will one day be the superior kult power, it is likely with the increasing co-operation between the elven kults that the most prominent of the two pillar-cities will one day become the Dormetian capital of the *Invisible Empire*. Should this coincide with the fulfilment of the Ansilsae and the rise of the Fifth Dominion (see *Wair-Rae: Unae Book 1*), then surely all will be lost for the elves of Unae.





THE WAIR-RAE KULTS

Kae Kala Morduru

The Kult of Murder has all the same hallmarks of blood and death as the human Kult of Mortigi (see issue 15). The mark of this kult is a black teardrop tattoo, for an elvish assassin will often weep ecstatically for his victim whom he considers he has safely delivered into the welcoming arms of Morduru. The preferred weapon of these assassins (and they are widely trained in arts of killing) is the *Tongue of Morduru*, a stiletto-like dagger engraved with the kult motto: "I give the gift of death".

The biggest covens of Morduru are in Rumaza, Akermanis and Lae Yamere; in all these places they are outlawed (as all the Terura Kala are) yet amazingly they are known to prosper, charging large sums for their specialist services to the wealthy. The Rumaza assassins are the most feared as they are known to travel widely in plying their deadly trade. The most famed of these Rumaza assassins is Kae Balad Hor - *The Black Hood* - a slayer-priest gifted with incredibly potent stealth magicks.

Kae Kala Balgora

The Kult of Slaughter is a small but vicious group. It has covens around rural Rumaza and in the Southern Colonies. It is widely rumoured that the Reaver crews that have raided western Fletland are largely Kae Kala Balgora kultists. The followers of this kult use the silver dagger as their symbol which they wear discretely as jewellery, embroidery and decoration. They believe that in taking lives they gain the power of their victims as the spirit is offered to *Balguru* the blood hungry aspect of Terura. Humans make poor food for Balguru and must be slaughtered in greater numbers to please him. Most covens exist as raiding battle units, abandoned to an eternal search for blood and lives.

Kae Selmor Tesura

The Dancers of Pain are considered dangerous lunatics by the Kinreda. The followers of this aspect of Terura, known to them as Hurgonis (the Hurt One), believe that through suffering they elevate themselves in the eyes of their lord who himself has suffered at the hands of the elven pantheon. The greater the pain they endure, the more deserving they are of a place in the next world, and they preach this creed vehemently. All followers of Hurgonis appear depressed and often exhibit signs of bruising and soreness. The ultimate self-sacrifice is ritual self-beheading which only the most fanatical and exalted kultists attempt.

Their icon is the whip and their symbols depict pain inflicted in a number of exquisite ways. They always worship stripped to the waist, exposing naked skin (tattooed with these symbols) to the lash, flames, blades or boiling water. Many of these kultists try to find positions as prison guards, torturers and the like so that they can share their faith with non-believers. It is rumoured that the High King's trusted College of Executioners harbours several kultists, that even the First Lector of the College, Cosio Ferna, has secret leanings towards Hurgonis.

The kult is mainly based in Akermanis and Rumaza.



Kae Kala Muskae

The Kult of Lust. It was followers of this aspect of Terura, known to them as *Jaelomalin*, who are said to have brought the chaos and fall of the Second Dominion. Followers of Jaelomalin believe that they are here on Unae solely to expand the elven race; of course there is only one way to achieve that. Their explorations of the various methods of conjugation are as legendary as the hand-painted guide-tomes the kult circulates through its many covens. Contrary to elvish custom and lore, Kae Kala Muskae kultists are not monogamous.

The most common symbols of this kult are in lurid red and feature many perverted fetishes of reproduction and fertility. The kult has covens active in every city, but is strongest in Yamere, Akermanis, Rumaza, Markae, Andrin Lae and Jeballis.

Behind brightly painted but firmly locked doors, Kae Kala Muskae coven meetings are said to descend into contorted orgies of sensual depravity that even the most high-minded nobles and courtiers of Wair-Rae like to gossip and titter about.

Desmorru

The Friends of the Undead follow the aspect of Terura, called Desmorru, which seeks revenge on the living by taking control of the dead. To this end the kultists raise the dead with necromantic magic and use these poor spirits as servants to conduct their dark errands. In many cases, they command spirits to locate their own naskae and then help the kultists to steal them. The spirits are usually shattered by this experience and become despairing haunts, doomed to eternal damnation.

The chief symbol of this kult is a bleached skull on a red or purple background. The largest covens are in Markae and Andrin Lae. These kultists often seek employment as undertakers, pall bearers, mourners and grave diggers giving them ready access to the dead.





A recently discovered coven in Yamere (see *Come One, Come All* this issue) is led by Amerthae, a kult-priest well versed in the ways of necromancy. Besides his great faith, Amerthae carries two necromantic items which make him a terrible opponent. These are a *Death Caul*, an enchanted birth membrane taken from the head of a child born out of wedlock which protects Amerthae from physical attacks; and a *Hand of the Grave*, a dessicated hand cut from a hanged man which, when one of its fingers are burnt, produces a dense cloud of sleep-inducing fumes.

Unsana

The Kult of Our Home worships the moon, believing that it is where the gods of the Kinreda dwell, and that is where the true home of the elven race is. It is their belief that the spirit of the moon, the Sana, will transport them there should they be able to gather enough naskae. Based only in Yamere and Akermanis, the faith is full of loopy people blessed by Teteri, god of the mad. They are also blessed with boundless energy, iron wills and bottomless enthusiasm. The Five Faiths and elven authority ignores them, not even taking the time to listen to their beliefs. To the Kinreda they are merely crazies best left to themselves, to their own kind they are the only sane elves in all of the dominion.

Wearing moon symbols and clothes that share the colours of Unae's silvery moon, the crazies have started to steal naskae,

proving that impatience is another of their qualities. Although open to all, most Unsana kultists seem to be from the entertainment professions - minstrels, tumblers, jugglers, buskers and the like.

Over the past season an increasing number of murders has occurred where the victim has been disembowelled and the naskae stolen. Several of these callous crimes have occurred in Yamere's Old Serhaem district shortly after the performance of a group of three minstrels calling themselves Reaper Moon.

Marmetae Kae Slejana

The Kult of Avida The Wealthy (see issue 15) is given the elven name Marmetae Kae Slejana. Followers of this kult display their allegiance with a measuring rod made from the most precious materials they can afford - silver etching, gold foil and even crushed gems adorn the most magnificent of these *Slejana Rules*. Initiated kult priests wielding these icons can cast cunning illusions to trick the unwary and sway the weak-willed.

Followers believe that Unae can only be conquered by trade, and that business deals blessed by Marmetae are transacted in the kultists' favour. The Kinreda denounce this kult as being obsessed by wealth and corrupted by greed, one of the great elvish weaknesses denounced in the Kae Ansilsae holy book.

As in the Heletian League, this kult mostly attracts rich nobles, merchants, traders and other such entrepreneurs. ■



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BLASPHEMOUS COVENS

Creating realistic secret Cults for Call of Cthulhu

Written by Andrew Boswell. Illustrated by Steve Newman

The Cultists house stood alone on the one patch of dry ground on Blacketts Marsh. On still moon filled nights the untimid observer, through the haze of midgets, could hear hideous shrieks and lunatic laughter. No window light could be seen, and no one unbidden returned unchanged. Folks thereabouts would say nothing about the place; only inclining their heads disdainfully. But two out of three men in Pickford would exchange knowing glances, and on the appointed nights excuse themselves from their wives to "go to the inn". Yet the well appointed Elizabethan Pigs Whistle, ordinarily a jolly place, was the quietest in the five counties at these times.

Cults and cultists are the meat and drink of the *Call of Cthulhu* horror roleplaying game. Few investigators will ever see a Great Old One, but their human minions, the insane worshippers, will be everywhere spreading their perverse interpretations of reality and perpetually tainting the 'normal' world. By definition a secret society cannot be fully comprehended by the investigating characters, for to do so would necessitate their total loss of sanity and a passing over into that other world of lunacy. Yet the Keeper must have a fairly clear understanding of the mechanisms of these cults. In doing so they create a fuller experience for the players, both in the immediate game and in providing a platform for recurring foes. The effective destruction of a cult headquarters will seldom eliminate all the worshippers, and these faithful devotees make excellent vengeful foils for the future.

The Object of the Cult

Any of the creatures described in *Call of Cthulhu* can be used as the focus of a cult. But despite the fact that Azathoth may (or may not) be the most powerful and at the centre of the universe, it is unwise to base a cult on him, or indeed any of the larger, more powerful creatures. This is because the essential truths of the universe are completely unknowable to the mortal, and this is enforced in the game by losing SAN when learning them. What comes about then is a form of insane paganism, possibly recognising a pantheon of gods, but certainly with many cults worshipping different beings, for different reasons. Any belief that Azathoth (or any of the elder gods) is a 'greatest' god leads the philosophically bent to the

conclusion that everything is merely a different manifestation of him. This is monotheism and it is what is more or less called sane in the world of the 1920s. Our cultists therefore believe the opposite, and operate on a local, personal scale.

The focus of a cult will usually be able to be summoned by the congregation, and generally this manifestation will not slaughter outright too many people each time it appears. Certainly some blood is likely, but the continued dismembering of citizens with stir even the most chair bound Bobby to start asking questions.

Keepers Notes

Investigating characters will probably become aware of the existence of a cult through either the dire and mysterious warnings of a local friend or by the bizarre disappearances and murders in the area. They should be kept in the dark for as long as possible about the focus of a cult as this represents one of the actual pieces of knowledge/power central to worship.

Ideally, characters will only learn the identity of the creature worshipped at the moment of its summoning. Cultists will not always know the correct name of the creature concerned, and changes caused in translation of written material and in verbal misunderstanding due to accent will only accentuate this. Investigators may gain some clues before the loathsome abomination appears, but even if they are sure; the realisation of their correct guess will still come as a great shock to them.

Structure and Organisation

Following pagan models most cults are strictly hierachical, for the nature of worship always involves at least the sacrifice of MAGIC points and sometimes more. For this devotees (and especially unwilling subjects) must be regimented. There is no room for dissension or discussion. The dissemination of knowledge and power is always ruthlessly controlled. A number of 'levels' or 'ranks' will always separate the new recruits from the controlling lunatics of a cult. Magic numbers through the ages have included 3, 6, 7, 10 and 13, and these represent a reasonable number of levels for the recruits to go through before they are completely mad. The Golden Dawn, the most well known magical cult of the early 1900s, led by the demonic Alistair Crowley had an internal structure consisting of ten levels. These levels corresponded to the ten points on the

Hebrew Kabala or Tree of Life. The highest level will be occupied by only one person; the head priest. Many terms may be used for this position such as Magus, Warlock, Pope, Keeper of the Silver Key and so on.

Below this come the various levels of the faithful, decreasing in power and knowledge of the abomination they worship as one descends. At the bottom-most level are lowly initiates, who form the bulk of the cult, and are usually in zombie-like state while at devotions (a dullard behaviour which sometimes extends to their outside lives as well). Conversely they will still have possession of most of their SAN, and if the investigators hope to find collaboration it is here at the lowest level that it will be possible and nowhere else.

Keepers Notes

It is extremely difficult for an investigator to infiltrate a cult. At the lower levels of the organisation the only reward will be the gradual erosion of SAN. By the time that any real knowledge suitable as a weapon against the horror has been acquired the persons SAN is usually so low that there is little hope that anything positive can be achieved. For every ceremony that an investigator attends, above and beyond any loss of SAN by viewing any horror summoned, they will lose 1 SAN. Additionally a rise in the ranks of the cult is accompanied by a revelation of more Cthulhu mythos knowledge and this inevitably results in a progressively more severe loss of SAN. For example; a rise from first to second level will cause a 1d4 loss, a rise from second to third will cause a 1d4+1 loss and so on. So a rise from fifth to sixth will cause a 1d3+4 loss in SAN.

Recruitment and Membership

Members at the uppermost levels of the cult are insane. And in their insanity they have found the reason for their belief. Knowledge is their motivator, and in (initially probably harmless) study they stumbled on the Cthulhu mythos. Rejecting the religion and morals of their upbringing these people seek the information which will raise them above the petty values of mortal flesh.

But the initiates who first come to these meetings and who are in time drawn beyond their mortal will are a different matter. For them a motive must be personal and almost immediate. It has been argued that there are only two motivators for humans; greed and fear. Greed will move many as they perceive that this information will give them an advantage in business, love or power. This type of greed is what snares most people who, at first, 'dabble' in the magical arts. In most cases these people will be invited by business associates or friends, when it is perceived that they are 'seekers of truth', to a cult meeting. Few can resist the over-powering feelings which assault a newcomer to a ceremony.

Fear on the other hand is generated in some cases by personal mental weakness; they believe that they are helpless as individuals and willingly follow their stronger friends to



ceremonies to gain a sense of unity and strength. A more sinister aspect of fear recruitment is that of the direct threat to become part of a community. When nearly everyone in a district or township don white capes and burn crosses it is terrifying and hard to remain outside. Certainly if the head priest of the cult is an obvious magic user or zombie lord then the terror is very real and pertinent; "Join us or become a living ghost!". Some, of course, escape to a new home or bravely make a stand only to find themselves the subject of perverse (frequently terminal) cult ceremonies.

Of the two motivators greed will be most common in large urban population areas and fear will be more prevalent in small, often isolated, rural communities.

The headquarters location of a cult must provide two crucial elements. It must be easy for people to get to and simultaneously be difficult for anyone except those invited to enter and/or leave. Consequently the 'big house at the end of High Street' may not be the best choice for a cult HQ. Low windows and many doors would pose too much of a security risk. Alternately the 'old Town Hall down by the creek' is isolated and externally featureless enough to work. Similarly refurbished warehouses away from main thoroughfares, derelict factories and buildings of this nature, with little in the way of doors and windows, are ideal for the cultists' purposes.

Keepers Notes

Famous tomes or grimoires can be used as the focus and tempter of both the cult hierarchy and the investigators. Following rumours of the location of a specific text the investigators could stumble on the current owners; people who

not only revere its existence but actually use its blasphemous knowledge. Apart from the many recorded books well known to contain forbidden knowledge any of the following genuine books can be used by a cult to further its knowledge; the Key of Solomon, the Lemegeton (which dates back to at least 1500), and the Grimoire of Hornorius which was first published in 1670 but was probably written at least a century earlier.

Additionally; unsuspected items may be the focus of the leadership of the cult. Consider the paintings of Heironymous Bosch and his peers of the 16th century. Their depictions of the afterlife become chilling views of a world recognisable to the GOOs. These paintings are often real portals into that insane world and cultists study the representation to enhance their knowledge. Studying such a painting raises Cthulhu mythos knowledge by 1D4 per hour in uninterrupted study, and reduces SAN by the same amount. A naive subject, left in a locked room with such a painting for twenty four hours may not necessarily gain any Cthulhu Mythos knowledge, but they will definitely lose the requisite SAN and suffer from an identifiable insanity; Stupor or Demophobia are particularly suitable ones for a Bosch-like painting.

Travelling investigators may become alerted to the presence of a cult by the behaviour of local citizens. Those not within the cult or perhaps only new to its ranks will display distinct signs of fear and avoidance; refusing to discuss religion or politics and generally avoiding contact with strangers. Perhaps even evidence of zombie-like behaviour or dire hints of disappearances will be present. Low level cultists, those that can still carry on some semblance of a normal life, will always display tell tale behavioural traits. At the least they will appear dazed and over tired. They will be less rational and will avoid novel situations. To make a distinction between a cult novice and a coal miner (the bald description could fit both); the coal miner would always be in for a beer, would never turn down an opportunity for a punch up and likes a good shout at the football. Three golden clues for spotting sane people.

Higher members of the cult will show arrogance and contempt both for the uninitiated citizens and the investigators whom they will consider irrelevant and trivial. If they do deign to speak to the investigators their most likely topic of conversation will be to invite them to 'the club' for a drink, or something similar.

Ceremonies and Rituals

Ceremonies will involve singing or chanting for long periods, possibly with the inclusion of narcotics to increase exhaustion, suggestibility and malleability of the congregation. After this, when the crowd is in a tired and excited state the head priest will either summon the horror or present some other feat of magic. Without exception an expenditure of MAGIC points will occur and this is often completely without the congregation's conscious knowledge. Sacrifices of something living will often occur; either animals, backsliding cult members or captured victims who will not be missed (or indeed annoying investigators who have found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time). This blood letting, while not necessarily essential for summoning, helps to solidify the head priest's position and discourage dissension. It also saps SAN, further convincing initiates that here they've 'found the truth'.

Once a first view has been seen of the power of the divinity they worship only irregular further displays are required. Though, of course, after a summoning the being will of its own accord appear in the initiate's dreams, mocking, cavorting, rending at their soul and mind...

And apart from these obvious effects, the member of a cult or secret society can expect the support of the other members. In a small community it could mean the difference between life and death. In a city all the advantages of networking would come to the fore. Preferential treatment for fellow cultists is inevitable, and illegal, or at least unethical, help is also likely. For example, consider the situation if a local bank manager is a fellow cultist and large amount of cash is required for an expedition, possibly illegal but definitely secret, to obtain a certain painting from a foreign source. Private individuals could seldom raise the capital required to supply the equipment, generous bribes and recruit 'hard boys' for such an operation. Yet the resources of a cult could encompass this and extend its power in a wide web as a result.

Keepers Notes

The ceremonies and rituals of a cult will be a reflection of the specific object and focus of the cult. Fire Vampires, called and studied through an ancient painting of a fiery Star, will demand a ceremony which emphasises the power to destroy through heat and the visual impact of this. Cultists will bare themselves naked and expose their bodies to burning flames, shine bright hot lights at each other, walk on hot coals etc. If a cult were to be as stupid as to worship either Father Dagon or Mother Hydra, on the other hand, the focus is likely to be a book which contains summoning spells and chants. Ceremonies would involve long periods of tuneless droning and slapping of hands to simulate the sounds that such an evil might make. Higher level cultists would wander through the congregation slapping or striking at the faithful. The cult leader will read long passages from the book, probably in a perverse version of the creature's own tongue to the assembled crowd.

Any and all of which slowly but surely drains away sanity in the fashion already described.

Leadership and Control

Ultimately the purpose of belonging to a cult is to gain knowledge and power. These people are Gnostics, believing that true knowledge comes from intuition or divine inspiration. The goal of worshipping these repugnant creatures is to gain their 'wisdom' and in doing so become more like them. Cultists reject rational thinking and analysis and so the thought of being consumed by their object of worship is not horrifying, as it would be to any sane person, but the greatest opportunity to be absorbed into a much greater reality. As the cultists move up the ranks of their organisation they gain more knowledge and shed their sanity like so much unwanted baggage. At the highest levels of the cult they become 'above' normal human values, harnessing the power of their perverse gods and the sycophantic cravings of those below them to push further towards 'ultimate truth'.

Control and initiation of the summoning spells (and any other spells known to the sect), lies with the head priest. This person is, by definition, completely and irretrievably insane.

They believe with their whole heart that the creature that they devote their lives to is the most significant divine being. Perhaps they recognise the existence of other gods and other cults, and possibly some co-operation may be possible, but the head priest can never be convinced by rational argument to turn from their true faith. They will exercise complete autocratic control, their word is law and is always carried to the fullness of intention. With them at all times will be the visible symbol of their chosen position of authority. It may be a dreadful, mind bending book, or possibly a spell activating amulet, but it will always be near to the head priest. Theft or destruction of this item may disband the cult or shatter the control over the congregation, but it *will* enrage the head priest (and possibly the other-worldly owner) into revenge; long and painful.

Immediately below the head priest are the trusted lieutenants; few in number and dedicated in ensuring that their leader's orders are carried out. It is through these five or six individuals that the physical manifestation of the cult's power is exercised. They have seen with their own eyes the rewards vested in the head priest and they fervently hope to be elevated

to his or her position, probably after the next summoning when the leader is joyously consumed by their god. Their SAN is only a few points above zero and it is with this last vestige of humanity that they will issue the daily orders to the rest of the flock.

Keepers Notes

Trusted lieutenants of a cult will almost always be armed with a revolver, or at least a knife of some sort. Without exception they are willing to sacrifice their lives to protect the

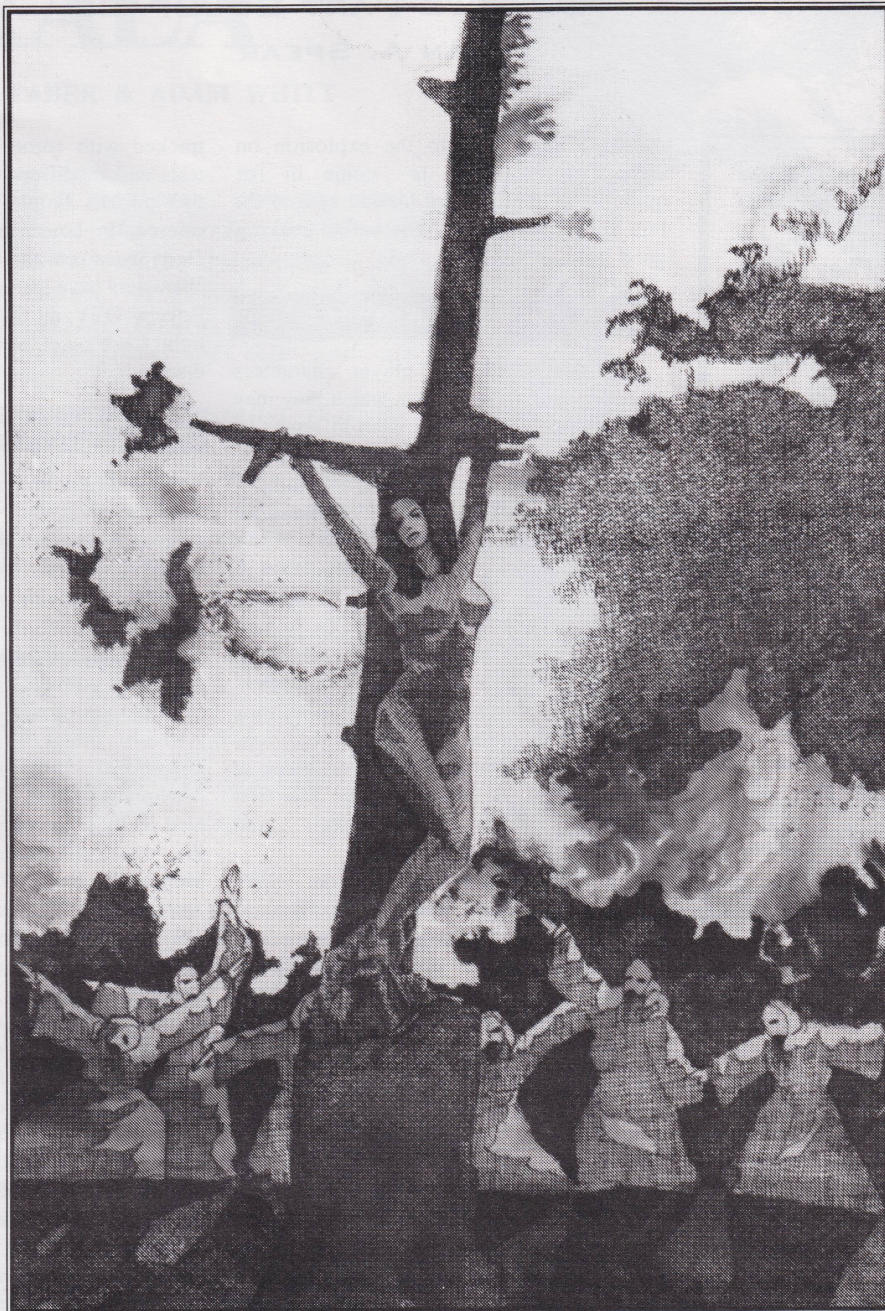
cult leader, the cult property and the secrets of the cult. Higher level cult members are dangerously insane, and only long periods of serious medical help will restore them to any form of sanity (see *Taint of Madness*).

Cult leaders may occupy a position or rank in the normal community, a Bank Manager or Priest for example. More likely they lead hermitic lives, secreted away from the prying

eyes of investigators and other fools who do not understand. In either case the only topic of conversation a cult leader will be interested in is his or her revelation of the truth. This conversation would be laughable if it were not dangerous. Almost without exception cult leaders will have studied or are naturally proficient in the techniques popularised by Mesmer. For every 5 minutes spent talking to the leader all investigators listening must make a resistance test pitting their POW against his. Failure indicates a temporary d4 loss in POW. This is not noticeable as anything other than fatigue or maybe frustration. When a character's POW has been reduced to zero, SAN is sapped at 1 point for every further five minutes spent talking. Both POW and SAN can be restored at the normal rate, and a

character can end the conversation at any time. But the Keeper should roleplay this out, keeping the purpose of the die rolls secret, and leading the investigators to believe that they may really be getting somewhere in their interrogations. ■

Andrew Boswell is a regular contributor to Australian Realms. He lives in Nunawading, Victoria with his wife Gaye. Recently he was pleased to announce the birth of his firstborn, Aidan Robert. Andrew said both mother and baby are doing well and... "I'm stoked!"



NED KELLY'S LAST STAND!

EXPLOSIVE CONCLUSION TO A TWO-PART SOLSPACE™ ADVENTURE

BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR

"My work here may have been compromised by UN Investigators appointed by Marshall Dukovi. They have infiltrated base security and discovered the involvement of the Claws in the Ceres incident. I regret to inform you that Operative Unit Vorax was unable to liquidate them.

I do not know how much other information they may have discovered, but I shall keep you advised. Suggest that you alert all other Operative Units to possible security breach.

Removal of liabilities will begin immediately..."

Message from Andrei Base, destination unknown.

cyborg killer linked to the explosion on Ceres. Not wishing to "come in for questioning", the cyborg instead engaged the PCs in a savage fire-fight before making good his escape.

A TIME FOR CHOICES

By this stage, the player characters probably have three options which they may pursue. Firstly, they may wish to return to Algernon and report their findings, hopefully with some evidence, to Marshall Dukovi. This may lead to the UN's bombing investigation being focussed upon CAM's involvement, and its links to The Claws. A lengthy lawsuit and punitive action against CAM and The Claws is likely to follow. Unfortunately, if this option is taken, there is very little chance of the player characters being able to catch The Claws whom they may have found on Andrei. In addition, Lukreta will not be at all keen on going to Algernon, as she may well be the first successful escapee from Andrei - and therefore a very wanted woman!

Secondly, if Lukreta escapes from Andrei she may come good with her promise and lead the AI team to the main headquarters of the Claws, although she will not tell the player characters this until they have arrived! Lukreta will then demand to be set free on a nearby asteroid where she has a secret bolt-hole, and will soon vanish into the Belt if allowed to leave. Why would Lukreta betray her former clan? Because it was her own competing clan members from the Claws who sold her out to the authorities in the first place, thereby resulting in a conviction for piracy and a lifetime in the mines. Such treachery is common amongst The Claws, and Lukreta hopes to see herself revenged when the player characters discover, and hopefully deal with, the base of her treacherous comrades!

Finally, the player characters may wish to immediately pursue the fleeing Rovers in their OTV. This will not be easy, as the Claws speed through the Belt to their home base with a head start on the AI team. Fortunately for the player characters, the ECM array was not properly activated and slightly damaged during the Rovers' speedy departure, therefore allowing them to be

tracked with some difficulty. The various tests and modifiers which are applicable in this pursuit should be determined by the referee, in consultation with the rules of *Deep Space*. On the other hand, if the player characters have managed to stow away on the Rovers' OTV, all they have to do is hang on tight, keep quiet, and pray that they are not discovered!

A TRAITOROUS VICTORY

Whether with Lukreta's help or by their own cunning, the player characters may eventually discover the secret headquarters of the Claws'. The Rover clan's headquarters consists of nothing less than the Ned Kelly, an RUK prison ship which was captured seven months ago by the Claws in a brilliant display of piratical cunning and treachery!

The Ned Kelly was actually captured virtually intact by the Claws, and was converted into their secret mobile headquarters. The Claws have equipped the Ned Kelly with sophisticated gear similar to that which the player characters may have seen on the Rover OTV which escaped from Andrei Base. The former prison ship is not only concealed electronically, however, as the entire vessel has had a multitude of small asteroids fixed to its outer hull. The resulting visual effect, from a distance, is that of a elongated asteroid which has successfully fooled several Royal Navy patrol vessels in the past. Concealed visually and electronically, yet still fully operational and crewed by the majority of the Claws, the capture of the Ned Kelly is a major coup and secret weapon for the Rovers!

How was the Ned Kelly captured? Treachery! Several members of the Claws had managed to infiltrate the Prisons Division two years prior to the Belt War, in anticipation of a conflict between the RUK and the Rovers. Assigned to the Ned Kelly, these Rovers masqueraded as loyal personnel until the time was right to strike. When the prison ship was deep into the Belt and its escorts had been diverted by other Rover activity, the traitors on the Ned Kelly received their coded instructions to act. Having subverted the Ned Kelly's hardened circuitry and EMP sponges, the Rovers detonated several powerful EMP bombs

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE...

In the first part of this adventure, the PCs were hired by Amnesty Interspatial to ensure the safety of one of that group's more radical units (based on Ceres). Unfortunately, within hours of their arrival on Ceres, the "Free the Slaves" office was destroyed in a massive explosion. The PCs were cleared of any involvement but found themselves press-ganged into helping with the UN investigation into the bombing.

Clues pointed to the involvement of the Claws, a notorious Rover gang, but the hardest evidence implicated Consolidated Asteroid Mining, the biggest of the three Belt mining companies. Armed with authorisation papers, the PCs journeyed to Andrei Base, CAM's main Belt Prison Mine. There they received a less than pleasant welcome from Jonas Velat, Andrei Base's administrator.

"Unauthorised investigations" by the PCs revealed that Andrei Base held numerous dirty secrets, including RUK prisoners, Rover clans involved in slavery and the presence of the "Tattooed Man", a vicious

within the prison ship, precisely at the moment when a vast wave of Claws were descending upon the vessel! With the ship's systems crippled and betrayed by their own crew members, even the RUK Space Marines aboard the Ned Kelly were unable to put up much resistance. Rapidly captured and towed to a concealed location, RUK investigators found nothing in the vacuum by the time they had pinpointed the Ned Kelly's last reported location.

NED KELLY'S LAST STAND

If the player characters chose to follow the Rover's OTV from Andrei Base, or allowed Lukreta to lead them to her "secret reward", they may well find themselves confronted with the Claws' traitorously-acquired headquarters drifting deep in the Belt. Perceptive characters may notice that a large spaceship seems to be concealed beneath the conglomeration of small asteroids, and those with a military background or good knowledge of Belt history may actually suspect that the spaceship is a prison ship. Drifting alongside the Ned Kelly is a vessel that could only be described as a sleek metallic shark, a craft of obvious speed and sophistication! Rovers can be seen swarming around the two vessels in a manner akin to Bio-Suit equipped insects, whilst a group of five large metallic humanoids cross the void from the shark-like ship to the Ned Kelly. Full

conversion Cyborgs! What are the feared Cyborgs, presumably from the hell-world of Mercury, doing in the Belt dealing with the Claws? More importantly, what are the player characters going to do about it?

Once again, the players are likely to formulate a number of maniac and memorable plans, whose viability must be assessed by the referee. Those who value their skins may desire to flee back to Ceres, inform Marshall Dukovi of their disturbing discovery, and stand back as the Royal Navy works itself into a frenzy of revenge! The resulting strike by the RUK forces is likely to see the recapture or destruction of their former prison vessel, yet this will be too late to foil the dastardly scheme that is being plotted between the Claws and the Cyborgs.

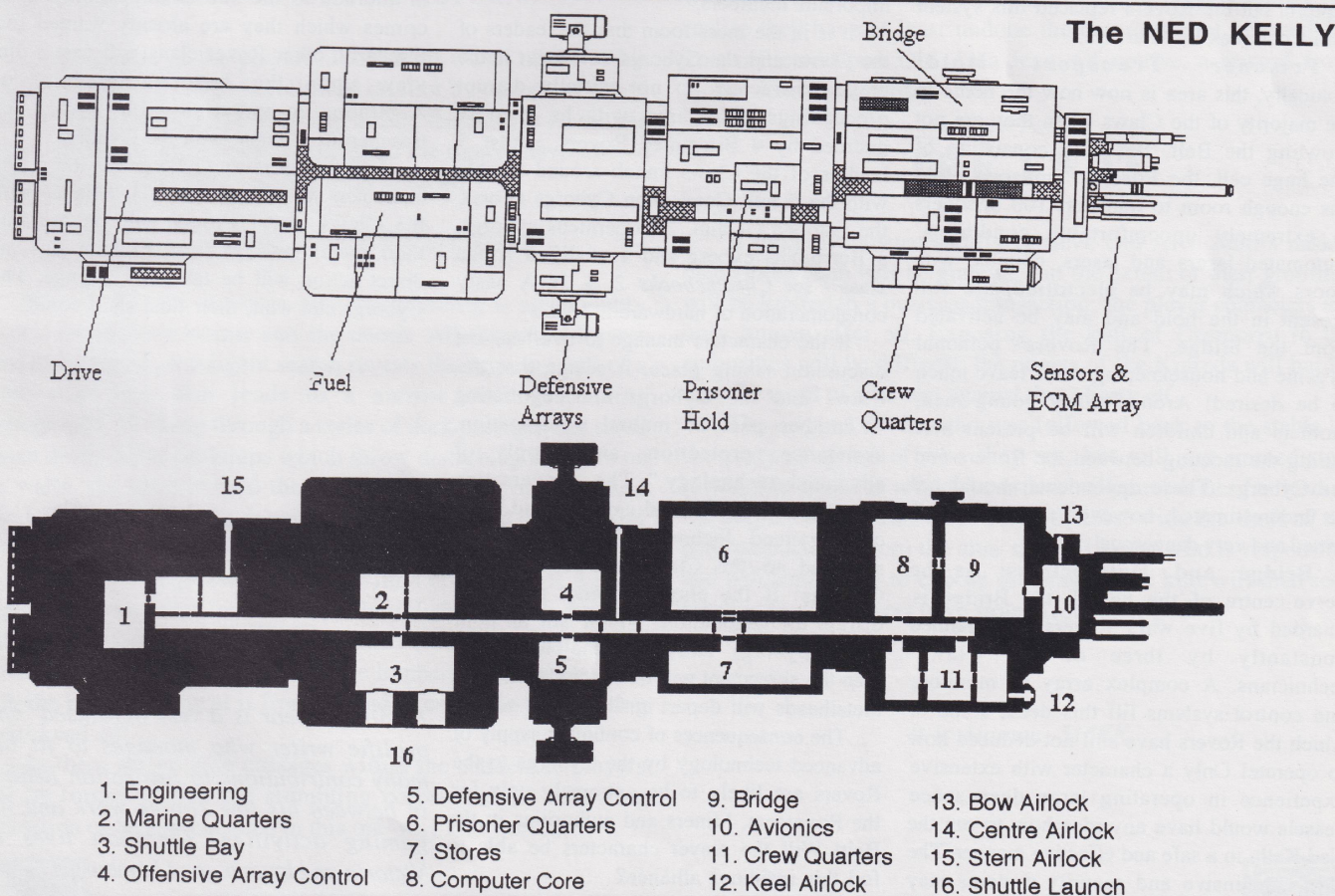
Brave, reckless or cunning player characters may formulate some means of attacking or disrupting the gathering of Rovers and Cyborgs, be this by a diversionary attack, sabotage, netrun, sowing suspicion, infiltration or other means. Consult the Ship Map and the following location descriptions for further information:

The Cyborg's Vessel: This silver shark-like craft is extremely swift, well armed and armoured with the latest technology of Mercury. The Cyborg's vessel has a number of complex security systems, its datafortress cannot be accessed externally, and its airlocks are sealed tight.

In other words, the player characters would be ill-advised to go anywhere near it, especially given that two combat cyborgs and a Wingman cyborg pilot (see *Chromebook 2* pp.77-78) are still on board!

The OTV from Andrei: The Rover's OTV that escaped from Andrei Base is drifting next to the Ned Kelly, and several of the Claws are still on board keeping guard and repairing systems such as the ECM array. The tattooed man (Vorax) is not here, however, as he has joined the gathering on board the flagship. The OTV is armed with a laser and two missiles, which provide the Rovers with enough firepower to harrass most Privateers.

Ned Kelly Exterior: The prison ship's exterior is covered with small asteroids which have been attached to the vessel, giving the impression of a large elongated asteroid from a distance. In doing so, the Claws have sacrificed much speed and manoeuvrability of the Ned Kelly, in favour of retaining the secrecy of their headquarters. Up close, the drives, weapon systems, antennae, airlocks and some windows may be seen and accessed. The exterior of the Ned Kelly is crawling with Bio-Suit equipped Rovers, who are watching for any treachery by the Cyborgs or other interference. Due to the vast size of the vessel and constantly shifting asteroids, it may be possible for the player characters to reach the exterior of the



Ned Kelly undetected. All airlocks into the vessel are guarded by two Rovers, however.

Access Shafts and Elevators: Travel between each deck of the Ned Kelly is accomplished by means of elevators or corresponding access shafts. It should be noted that some of the shafts and all of the elevators are fitted with security cameras who display their images to the bridge.

Engineering: The aft decks of the prison ship consist of the drives, nuclear power systems, fuel storage, damage control facilities, spare parts store and workshop. These areas are dimly lit, filthy, convoluted, and only inhabited by a few of the lower ranked members of the Claws and some technicians.

Weapon Systems: The Ned Kelly possesses a limited array of weapons, including lasers, kinetic-kill devices, and conventional missiles. Whilst these were damaged during the Claws' capture of the vessel, all the weapon systems have since been reconstructed with scavenged and stolen spare parts. Most weapon systems are manned and guarded by several Rovers who are trained in their use.

Defensive Systems: In addition to the prison ship's armour and asteroid covering, the Ned Kelly retains functioning defences such as chaff, flares, counter-missiles, and aerosols which are activated from the Bridge. The ship's military jamming system was damaged beyond repair as a result of the EMP blast during the ship's capture, but the Rovers replaced this system with a complex ECM array.

Prisoner Transport Hold: Ironically, this area is now now the home to the majority of the Claws when they are not prowling the Belt. Basically consisting of one huge cell, the Prisoner Transport Hold has enough room to transport 100 prisoners in extremely uncomfortable conditions. Automated lasers and tasers, coupled with floors which may be electrified, are still present in the hold and may be activated from the bridge. The Rovers' personal hygiene and housekeeping skills leave much to be desired! Around thirty young men, mothers and children will be present here during the meeting between the Rovers and the Cyborgs. These dependents should not be underestimated, however, as they are all armed and very dangerous!

Bridge and Datafortress: As the nerve-centre of the vessel, the Bridge is guarded by five wary Rovers and manned constantly by three of the Claws' technicians. A complex array of monitors and control systems fill this deck, some of which the Rovers have still not deduced how to operate! Only a character with extensive experience in operating large deep space vessels would have any idea how to run the Ned Kelly in a safe and effective manner. The ship's defensive and security systems may

all be controlled from the Bridge, as can the drives, power plant, and weapon systems.

In addition, the prison ship's mainframe computer is physically located in the Bridge and is attended by two Weefle-Level Systems Operators (see *Guide to the Net* p.151). The Weefles are the least of an intruding netrunner's problems, however. Apart from the fact that the Ned Kelly's datafortress must be accessed physically from within the vessel, all the Royal Navy's secret and deadly black ice is still operative within the system! Any intruder will have to tread very carefully past these merciless military programs if they are to access the ship's vital systems. The exact layout, defenses, and programs of the Ned Kelly's datafortress is left up to the referee's discretion, but remember that this is a hard military target!

Marine Quarters & Flight Deck: This area was once the barracks for the now-deceased RUK Space Marine contingent on board the Ned Kelly. It contains bunks, an armoury and a virtual training cell. This deck was the scene of much fierce fighting between the loyal RUK crew and the Claws during the capture of the Ned Kelly. As a result, most of the quarters are still awaiting repair before the area is habitable again, although the deck has been sealed and repressurised by Rover work crews.

Crew Quarters: The cramped Crew Quarters once included bunks, washrooms, a mess area, and recreation area. This is now the reserved quarters for the Claws' more important members.

It is in the mess room that the leaders of the Claws and the Cyborgs will meet if the player characters do not initially disrupt proceedings. The area will be heavily guarded by 4 Bio-suited Rovers, whilst 5 leaders of the Claws hunch around a table with the 5 Full Conversion Cyborgs (Vorax the tattooed Gemini, 2 Copernicus cyborgs, a Burroughs cyborg and a modified Alpha class - see *Chromebooks 2 & 3*). A nasty conglomeration of hardware indeed.

If the characters manage to overhear the discussion taking place, it seems that the Claws and the Cyborgs are negotiating "...another pact of mutual co-operation, assistance, protection, and supply of advanced technology." The conversation seems to revolve around amounts and costs of advanced technology that is to be supplied to the Claws by the Mercury Cyborgs! If the players cannot somehow disrupt the negotiations within half an hour of the Cyborgs' entry onto the Ned Kelly, then the agreement will be concluded and the metalheads will depart in their sleek vessel.

The consequences of continued supply of advanced technology by the Cyborgs to the Rovers are likely to be extremely ugly for the Privateers, Miners and authorities in the Belt! Will the player characters be able to foil this insidious alliance?

CONCLUSION

The ramifications of the players' investigation and actions may be significant, depending upon their success, bravery and skill - assuming that they survived the perils of the Belt! AI will pay the player characters their expected wage in full, with gratitude for their efforts. Having demonstrated their abilities, AI will keep the characters in mind for future missions of importance. Similarly, the UN and RUK will be extremely grateful for their efforts, possibly granting them a substantial award (referee's discretion), especially if their involvement in Lukreta's escape remains secret! In addition, the team will probably have earned a valuable friend and ally in Marshall Dukovi.

If the AI team have been at all competent, then CAM are sure to be in major legal trouble, with the UN and RUK hounding them for justice and revenge due to the mining company's apparent links to the bombing, co-operation with the Claws, lying to UN investigators, possible involvement in Rover slave trading, and blatant human rights abuses. Amnesty Interspatial may have a similar field-day at CAM's expense.

The Claws may be even more unpopular with the UN and RUK for their suspected involvement in carrying out the bombing, co-operation with the Mercury Cyborgs, slave trading, and capture of the Ned Kelly - in addition to the substantial assortment of crimes which they are already wanted for! Similarly, other Rover clans will cast a dim view upon the terrorist bombing of Algernon, co-operation with CAM, and treacherous alliance with the Cyborgs.

And the Mercury Cyborgs? If the player characters reveal and foil their alliance with the Claws, the Cyborgs will be grinding their metal jaws in fury. Despite this, no direct action will be taken in revenge. The Cyborgs can wait, their time shall come...

Jonathan Spear is a very organised and prolific writer who manages to fit his many contributions to Australian Realms in between his law course work and his gaming activities. Jonathan lives in Victoria and loves a good hamburger.

The NED KELLY (converted Armed Freighter)

Armed Freighter*1000*8*10*Chemical,Nuclear*8,10*Nuclear,Batteries,Fuel Cell*80%*4*200m*4*8*2*20*7*2 Cargo OTV

Built originally as an armed cargo carrier for the military and corps, this particular ship has found a lot of employment in the Belt as a Prison Transport. Its capacious cargo hold is converted into cramped living quarters for up to 100 prisoners. The original ship had a crew of 8, of which 4 were pilots for the OTVs. Passenger space was split into a 6-man Marine quarters and 2 extra with the crew. Some freighters carried fighters in lieu of the OTVs if travelling in dangerous zones, while others carried Passenger OTVs if used for transporting prisoners.

The Ned Kelly was armed with a Laser array, Kinetic Kill weapon and 1 Missile rack. For defense it carried 2 Chaff/Flare launchers, 2 Aerosol launchers and 1 Jammer.

Damage Points:

(4)B W (3)B D (2)B P B S B W B P B D B S B P B S 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MERCURY ARMED CLIPPER

Armed Clipper*1000*2*6*Chemical, Nuclear*8,10*Nuclear, Batteries*85%*5*30m*6*5*2*10*4*1 Flitter

One of a new generation of sleek craft from Mercury, this ship is a borderline blend of civilian cargo ship and warcraft. It has state of the art cybernetic control interfaces and is extremely fuel efficient. The life support aboard is geared towards mostly cyborg crews and passengers, allowing substantial weight and space savings. This means that the ship can be a lot smaller than an equivalent capability "meat" ship.

Typical weapon array is 1 Laser and 1 Missile Rack, coupled with 1 Chaff/Flares launcher and 2 sophisticated Jammers (two in conjunction can cause -60% to enemy sensor locks and prevent any radio communications for a 1000km radius in space. One has half the effect)

Damage Points:

(2)B W (2)B P B S B W D B 4 3 2 1

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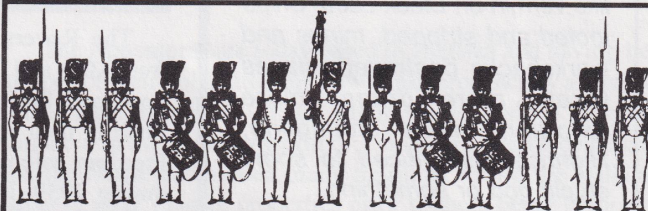
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SOLSPACE ROVERS

BY JONATHAN A. SPEAR & PAUL MITTING

"Back in 2035, we had those Rovers licked. It was a mean fight, and the RUK lost their flagship, but the UN, RUK and Commonwealth had those scum running through the Belt like useless little popsicles. Sure, I nearly died, but those Dan Dares saved my sorry little butt from those loony Clan Libertas raiders! Lilith Base was popped open like a can of Smash, and all our Rover problems were over..."

That should've been it! The end! But no, back they come like vermin on Black Lace! Ships looted and stripped, mines and workshacks destroyed, slaves taken, more drugs, more extortion, more smuggling, Highriders sacrificed to some stupid god or something...

I used to think that the UN was doing a good job out here, that we were winning along with the RUK. Now, I dunno... If only we could find out where those Rovers are getting all their military hardware..."

- UN Marshall Andreas Dukovi.

PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE

Stalking the Asteroid Belt like voracious jackals, the Rover clans pose a significant threat to the miners, corporations and privateers who ply this harsh and rocky void. Cunning, determined, and often desperate these piratical rogues prey upon the unwary and unprepared; killing, looting and enslaving commercial spacecraft. Despite the extensive and bloody Belt War of 2035,

the RUK, Commonwealth and UN forces were far from successful in completely eliminating the malevolent Rover presence amongst the dense asteroids. The Privateer Charter of 2036, allowing the arming of civilian vessels and bases, coupled with a mandate for private actions to be taken against Pirate activity, has proved to be controversial and rather ineffectual. Conversely, the Rover clans seem to have gained in strength, ruthlessness and skill since the Belt War, as the number and effect of pirate raids become ever more devastating.

Now, in 2037, it seems that the Rovers are ready to reclaim their title of PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE!

ROVER ORIGINS

The Rovers originated as dissidents from Mars and Luna, attracted to the more open and lawless lifestyle of the Belt. Pooling their resources they constructed Freedom colony on the Ramirez asteroid during 2030. However, it was not long before the more radical elements tried to force a takeover of the fledgling colony. The anarchic political system which the radicals wished to impose was a philosophy of lawlessness and individualism too great even for most Belters. The instigators and their more dedicated followers were evicted from Freedom, in a political battle that devolved into a brutal struggle of arms. The expulsion of the radicals was aided by the first UN Marshalls and agents to filter into the Belt, followed by a platoon of ACPA suited RUK Space Marines who intimidated the dissidents into leaving.

Taking with them a gaggle of secondhand mining and small cargo ships, the radicals bore a wellspring of enmity for the RUK, UN and the "lapdog" Freedom colony Belters. Determined to bring their version of enlightened government to SolSpace, these dissidents formed the first of what became known as the Rover clans.

THE LOOK

Above all else the Rover clans value freedom and individualism, a philosophy that is reflected in their diverse appearance. Like most Spacers and Asteroid Highriders, the Rovers experience great deviations from Dirtside physical norms. Their harsh lifestyle, coupled with nanotech viruses and genetic manipulation results in most Rovers being stronger, tougher and more radiation-resistant than the average Dirtsider. Gradually, the Rovers are growing longer, more slender bodies. A few are even developing benevolent mutations, such as prehensile feet, better tolerance to extremes of temperature and air pressure, extra digits, solar flare resistant eyes, the ability to use less and retain more oxygen in the body, oddly hued skin, curvature of the bones, and excellent resistance to motion sickness. There have even been rumours circulating around the Belt of Rovers demonstrating extraordinary mental powers, although the "witnesses" to such events proved rather unreliable under questioning. The UN has written off such "sightings" as hallucinations caused by the stresses of Belt life, coupled with poorly adjusted atmosphere and oxygen levels in spacesuits and workshacks!

The clothing worn by Rovers is as diverse as their gradually altering bodies (and minds if the rumours are of any substance). When relaxing at home in their rogue bases, bolt-holes and workshacks, most clan members opt to wear the practical Skinsuits which continue to dominate Highrider fashion. What sets each Rover apart is their individual decoration of their Skinsuit, primarily with patterns that reflect the heritage, lifestyle and status of the clan and self. The more radical Rovers consider gruesome jewelry and trophies, pagan symbols, "scalp badges", weapon harnesses, zero-gravity defying haircuts, ornate holo-tattoos and body-piercing to be ideal fashion accessories!

ROVER CHROME

When on the job, be it piracy, mining, smuggling, slave-trading, extortion or negotiating illicit dealings, Rovers arm and armour themselves to the teeth. Their entire lifestyle is one of danger, death and struggle against the hated "system", and their fearsome working equipment reflects this. Custom painted and modified cybernetic Bio-Suits, often scavenged from fallen foes, are the armour of choice for virtually all adult Rovers. Recently, a number of Rover clans have appeared in expensive state-of-the-Edge Bio-Suits, leading the UN Marshalls puzzled as to how they were acquired, and from whom.

A similarly disturbing recent trend is the sudden increase in the number and substantial armament of small Rover raiding craft and rogue bases. Sophisticated personal and heavy weaponry has been used by Pirates to great effect, crushing all resistance with a combination of deadly firepower, superb armour, and raw ferocity! The UN and RUK are becoming extremely anxious to trace the source of the potentially devastating new technology which the Rovers seem to be acquiring so rapidly. The numerous but poorly equipped and disunited rabble that the RUK faced in the

2035 Belt War are being replaced by a far more cohesive and well armed Rover threat in 2037...

CLAN SHIPS

The most common vessel used by the Clans are Deep Space OTVs, often extensively modified and upgunned. Many were legitimately purchased, usually second hand, but a number have been acquired by hijacking and piracy. All are kept in excellent operational order, with many spare parts hand made by skilled clan techs.

Clans tend to keep all of the ships together in a small fleet. At the core will be the OTVs, with Cargo Clippers and Freighters carrying many of the families and clan possessions. Around them will be a screen of Sting Ships and remote Gun Drones. When the Clan engages in hazardous missions, the main fleet will be left in deep space or tethered to an asteroid while the fighting ships move off.

Clan Libertas has been known to field at least 3 Deltas, a captured Commonwealth Gunship and over a dozen Sting ships in one raid alone.

FEALTY & FEUDING

Living as vicious outlaws and pirates in one of the harshest locations in the Solar System may have gained the Rovers a fearsome reputation, but the price they pay is great. The high incidence of ruthless conflict in an unforgiving environment between the Rovers and the UN, RUK, corporations, privateers and other clans results in an extremely short life-expectancy for most clan members. This problem is exacerbated by the poor quality of Rover living conditions, limited access to medical treatment, high exposure to radiation and a "gung-ho" attitude - *"Live fast, die young and float a good-looking corpse in the vacuum"*.

Such a lifestyle demands strong cohesion, as each member must trust their brothers and sisters to support and fight with them in order to survive against the opposition and nature itself. The resulting sense of family loyalty and personal honour within the clans is very strong, as internal clan rivalries are usually settled with minimal disruption and outright betrayal is almost unheard of. When one member of a Rover clan is insulted or attacked, it's certain that the family will support them without question - or wreak terrible revenge upon the perpetrator!

BIO-SUITS

These powered space suits are a blend of refined ACPA technology and advances cyberforms. Each suit has an integral ceretronic brain and life support systems, with its own sensory arrays and movement capability. The wearer "jacks in" like an ACPA, but the linking of the onboard brain and the wearer's allows a higher level of movement and awareness than in conventional suits.

It takes about 24 to 36 hours of use to adapt the cyberform to your own body's movements and senses. Thereafter, while jacked, the wearer can operate with almost normal movement. Their Awareness skills are enhanced by +2 to all attempts due to the sophisticated sensor feedback. Effective strength (BOD) is raised by +2 for all purposes (except BOD saves when wounded). Reflexes are boosted by +1 as the bio-suit matches and enhances the wearer's actions.

Life support for the wearer is 24 hours of hard use. This is longer if the person remains passive or has minimal life support needs (eg: heavily augmented). Rad protection is 10 RSP per turn. Bio-Suits are self sealing in the case of punctures or cuts up to 3cm across.

COMBAT STATS:

Location	SP	SDP (to disable)	SDP (to destroy)	Option Spaces
Head	30	6	10	1 + 4 Optic / Sensor Spaces
Torso	30	15	20	2
Arms (each)	30	6	10	2
Legs (each)	30	12	18	2

EV: +0 if adapted to suit and jacked. -1 if not adapted. -5 if not jacked to suit.

Hits to the suit that penetrate do half damage to the location's SDP and half to the wearer.

COST: 8000 to 12000 Eb, depending on local demand and supply. If bought outside the Belt, prices can be up to double this, even for older suits.

The sense of clan loyalty does not apply very strongly between different Rover clans. Whilst different clans often make alliances, these are usually only for practical business and military purposes, and are temporary in nature. An uneasy truce and loose network of alliances unites the Rover Clans as a whole, but backstabbing and double-crossing are common occurrences between the clans.

The Rover clans have established a form of government amongst themselves. Each clan has a leader, sometimes elected but usually the most powerful individual, and these clan leaders meet occasionally at a Clan Allthing. The Allthing is held at different locations and times which are transmitted only to Rovers. Here the clans discuss those issues that they need to, resolve conflicts, and occasionally declare war between clans. A clan may be declared "outcast", and such a pronouncement usually means that its members will be attacked on sight by other Rover clans.

MOTHER SOL

Whilst much of the RUK Nomadic Movement on the Dirtside worship the Earth and Nature in a Pagan revival, the Rover clans take a somewhat different attitude towards religion. The Rovers have developed their own unique pagan beliefs based upon worship of Mother Sol, the Sun, and her three aspects, the *Triad of Atmosphere, Radiation and Gravity*. Knowledge of the Triad is vital to the survival of all Highriders, but the Rover clans have transformed this necessity into a religion, as *Sol Shamans* dwell within each clan and serve as spiritual, medical and political advisors to the clan leader.

Mother Sol is particularly worshipped when a solar flare or conjunction of planets with the Sun occurs. In fact, fanatically devout clans have been known to strap captives onto ceremonial altars, leaving them exposed to strong solar flares and a hideous radiation-induced death! Such human sacrifices are said to please Mother Sol, who will protect the Rover clan from the effects of the Triad.

It is important to remember that not all clans follow this new religion, and some only pay lip service in order to trade with believers.

THE CLANS

The Rovers of the Asteroid Belt are divided into many clans, whose sizes vary from that of a small family to several

hundred members. Despite the fact that the fortunes of the clans tend to rise and fall very rapidly, there are several clans who have long remained large and influential forces within the loose Rover network.

Clan Libertas - The core of the original radical movement on Freedom base, Clan Libertas consists of approximately five hundred members. Still the dominant political force within the Rover government and at Clan Allthings, this clan has the most politically experienced leader amongst the clans - *Chief Nozumo Takohoto*. A veteran of early rebellions on Mars and the leader of the radicals at Freedom Base, Takohoto has managed to cling to power, despite the many setbacks the Rovers suffered during their expulsion and subsequent Belt War defeat.

Clan Libertas' great numbers provide them with substantial military power, coupled with a wide-ranging web of illegal activities that generate a substantial income. The Clan originated the worship of Mother Sol, and has some of the most fanatical followers. Interestingly, Chief Takohoto has often been accused of deliberately creating the following (of which he is Patriarch) purely for political means. The accusers were killed of course in trial by combat.

Bandicoots - Regardless of their ridiculous name, which was originally inspired by the large number of former Australian citizens in the clan, the Bandicoots remain a power in the region surrounding the Danson asteroid and Farhome base. This clan is notable for its moderate political views and (comparatively) peaceful means of operation. The Bandicoots prefer to operate extensive extortion rackets throughout their territory, rather than engaging in overt piracy and destruction. The Bandicoots have managed to keep in the good books of a number of large Belt colonies and are the principal traders between Belters and Rovers. Among their prized possessions are two TFM fitted cargo ships that they use to run cargo (and occasionally illicit goods) between Mars, Europa and the Asteroid Belt.

The Claws - As a radical fringe group that is growing in numbers and power, The Claws are a clan to watch in the future. They have rejected the views of Clan Libertas, which they regard as too "soft", and advocate the sabotage and destruction of all government organisa-



tions and institutions, including the Clan Allthing and worship of Mother Sol!

True anarchists and lacking any honour, The Claws are constantly fighting amongst themselves and with the other Rover Clans. Having been branded as "outcasts" at a recent Clan Allthing, this radical fringe continues to attract members from amongst those Belters who share The Claws' extreme view of freedom. Ships and bases operated by the Claws tend to be old, worn and badly in need of a good cleaning. Their current aim is the obtain some new fighting ships, and they have been noted as willing to go to any lengths to get them.

Clan McGregor - An offshoot of the original group of dissidents, this clan formed around Warmaster Erik McGregor. He was indoctrinated a few years ago into the Cult of Mars, and has successfully led his clan to a number of raids against corporate and military bases. This has given him two major edges over Libertas - advanced stolen weaponry and ships, and a reputation you could never buy. Word across the comm net is that McGregor is looking to oust Libertas as the preeminent clan of Rovers. ■

Flesh, Steel & Dice

A Comparison Of Roleplaying Combat And Simulated Live Combat

By Paul "Mango The Magnificent" Mitting

Grey Company Inc. formed back in 1984 as a logical offshoot of the University of WA's science fiction and gaming fraternity. Or at least it seemed logical back then. The core of the group was formed around a few Uni friends who had travelled to England and joined one of the historical reenactment bands that flourish there. They came back to Perth, and encouraged the keen young minds here to beat each other with lengths of blunted steel bars that we called swords.

Over the years the group has grown in size and improved in appearance. We now look reasonably authentic, and have grown practised in the arts of combat and the manufacture of our weapons and armour. Part of the learning experience was to discard most of what we heard and read from various sources (especially movies and novels) and apply the grim reality of practicality. The old heavy swords and crappy helmets have given way to lighter, more plausible weapons and functional but historically accurate helmets and armour.

The aim of the group was always to present a reenactment of Dark Age warfare that was exciting. History is fascinating to many people, but the average audience wants violence and style. They don't care if that Huscarl is accurately portrayed, they just want to see him hack down a horde of Viking raiders. As a display group, we appeal to the lowest common denominator in our audiences - the blood thirsty ten year old!

The origins of Grey Co has tended to mean that most of our members are rabid gamers, either card, role-playing or wargamer. Some of us are all three. For that reason, when we fight, we often look at what we are doing and compare that to the various combat systems we have played with. It is amazing how many games have a basically sound, but very abstract view of combat. In particular, hand to hand combat using weapons from the Dark Age and Medieval eras. I remember my earliest gaming session was with *RuneQuest*, and that coincided with my first forays into steel on flesh at Grey Co. The game captured me with it's excellent portrayal of combat and the fumble tables still surprise me with their accuracy.

For those of you who don't know them, the fumble tables included such things as shield straps breaking (I've lost my shield strapping on three separate occasions), helmets slipping down or sideways (a great way to die in a fight, believe me) and the old classic of accidentally hitting a friendly fighter in the heat of a frantic melee.

Time for Combat

A fight between an experienced fighter and a "newbie" can be quite entertaining. For the experienced fighter. For the newbie, it tends to be a quick clash of blades and then they're dead. It can take a little longer if they run away, but not much. The back makes a very big target you know.

Games vary in how much time they allocate to one round of actions for players. In my favourite, *CyberPunk 2020*, you get three seconds. In my old stalwart *AD&D* you get one minute. Practical experience leads one to feel that CP2020 has it about right. Three seconds is a long time in close combat. Enough time to close to melee range, throw a few feints, deliver your attack, and scoot back out again. Dead in three seconds. Easy.

Of course, the better fighters (and the lucky ones) often manage to parry, and even get their own blows in. This can still all occur in those three seconds, and it gets pretty hectic. Most fighters attack with a series of blows, including one or two attempted kill strikes, then back out of range. They may have to do this many times before landing a good blow. I suppose this is where the one minute combat round comes from, but that's getting pretty abstract. I have seen magnificent battles fought between one fighter and three attackers that last two minutes tops. And that includes the *coup de gras*.

Armour Maketh the Man

If you thought people look good in uniforms, they look downright awesome in armour. Even the weediest stick can get a set of shoulders and a chest wearing a mail coat. Yet there is also a more practical side to wearing armour.

The most obvious advantage is that any blow that gets past your defence has to deal with your armour before it deals with you. Armour is tricky stuff in this regard. It will stop those light cuts and bruises quite well. Big, shattering blows from your enemy are a different thing altogether. No suit of armour is impervious. A fully armoured knight in Foot Plate can still be killed with a thrust to the joints or a hard swung blow from an axe. The knack of bringing your armour to bear to best handle a threat comes only with experience in combat.

Armour is not as heavy and difficult to move in as some movies, books and games would have you believe. It was designed to give as much freedom of movement as possible. Some types of movement can be quite hard in certain armours, especially the rigid types (eg: plate, scale). So you learn to adapt your movements to overcome these limits. I have seen people climb fences, run full tilt, jump and roll in their armour. The only thing you can't do is swim. But feel free to try that one for yourself. Go on, I dares ya!



Dressing for the Party

How many players have had their character awake in the night, spot the random encounter, armour up in one round flat and join battle? I know lot's of my old gaming buddies thought it quite feasible. The fact is, you need help to get into most of the heavy armours. Lengthy help. Look up some history books on knights, especially the later plate and plate mail types. What do you think squires were for? Getting the boss dressed every day before battle.

Mail coats (chainmail shirts and hauberks) are the quickest to get on and off. Normally they would be worn with a padded gambeson (long, thick jacket), yet in a hurry or in warm weather this could be left off. We can get mail coat, helmet, shield and sword ready in about 20 to 30 seconds, provided they are close to hand. That's not full fighting kit, but it would be enough to bust some orc heads in, in the middle of the night.

Shields

Nearly every warrior culture in history used shields to defend themselves. There is a good reason for it. A shield can be used to stop or deflect an attack before it even gets to your body. You don't even need armour if you have a shield, although I wouldn't leave your armour behind if you have a suit. Shields tend to come in three types. There are the small bucklers, the large shield and the siege shield. The first are really for skirmishers, the siege shield are for firing arrows from behind. The large shield is the best all round defence. They come in all shapes, yet their essential purpose is the same: to take the blow that was meant for your poor warm flesh.

Parrying with a shield becomes an instinctive action - many of my fellow Grey Co fighters swear they barely register the incoming blow before their shield arm has brought the shield across to block. It has to become instinctual because you need to focus your mind on getting your own weapon stuck into the

other guy's body. That is why a larger shield is good for all round defence. A bigger surface area means a better chance of connecting with the weapon. I tend to classify shield work into *passive* and *aggressive*. Passive shield work is where you do all the fighting with your weapon, and only use the shield to parry or turn incoming blows. Aggressive shield work (my personal favourite) is where you actively stick the shield into your enemy's personal space.

Typical manoeuvres are the *bash*, the *sweep* and the *press*. Bashing with a shield means getting your shoulder behind it and charging your enemy. You rely on body mass (which armour adds to, by the way) to try and knock them over or stun them senseless. You then follow up with a weapon strike. Or another bash if you feel inclined.

The sweep is designed to catch your enemy's weapon and drag it out to the side. This hopefully leaves them vulnerable for a shot to their outstretched arm or side. It also means you are in less danger of a return shot from your enemy as their weapon is now way off line for an attack. The press is probably the meanest of them all. It incorporates elements of both the bash and the sweep. In essence, the manoeuvre is to rush your enemy with shield forwards, trapping their weapon between your shield and their body. This is followed up with a push (to knock them over) or a blow to the head. A press is the best way to close with a polearm equipped target, or someone with a two handed sword. It locks their weapon up and enables you to strike them fairly easily.

Of course, a trained fighter is aware of these tricks and has his own ways of avoiding them. To avoid the bash, you either bash them back (biggest and strongest wins here) or side step and cut them as they go floundering past. The sweep can be countered as you draw the attacker's shield out with your weapon, but then you drop your weapon low and cut up into the side or armpit. The press is best handled by either a back step or side step, with a low cut to the legs or a high cut to the head. Sounds easy doesn't it. Can be, but nothing is guaranteed to work every time.

Did You See That ?

How many players have had a character in the midst of some serious bun fight start looking at his companions and their plight, rushed over to help them, to stab that naughty archer, or render aid to the dying fellow in arms. Most of us. We assume that as simple an act as seeing everything that occurs around us would not be hampered by a life and death struggle. Wrong. In a massed battle, you tend to get two common scenarios. The first is where you fight in a formation (usually a line or "wall") against a similar opponent. The other is melee where every one is mixed in, friend and foe alike, all trying to kill and avoid being killed. Generals hate melee, as there is no control possible, no orders or disciplined combat. Melee is where you tend to get hit in the back a lot. You have to focus so intently on avoiding death from the hordes in front that you never see that blow from behind. Or even from the side. At a recent massed combat I attended in Brisbane, I died from a spear thrust by someone six or seven fighters down the line. I never saw him reach out at me until after I had been killed. Too bloody late then I can assure you.

Spotting your mates, and reacting to what happens to them, is a luxury you can rarely afford. Even in a formation you have to watch out for at least three enemies in front of you. The one directly in front, and his mates to either side. If you take your attention off them for even a second they will "cross cut" you. It takes an instant to see an opponent is not paying attention to you and to hit them cleanly. Never take your eyes off an enemy. And remember to watch everything going on around you. When you can do both, you'll be a legend.

The Best Weapon

An eternal argument. It depends on too many variables. Most weapons were designed to deal with a particular problem, and are less effective in other situations. The best all round weapon I have encountered is the one handed sword, teamed with a good sized shield. Many fighters prefer two handed weapons, both for their reach and manoeuvrability. Two hands can move a weapon around pretty fast sometimes. The trade off is that polearms and two handed swords can be difficult to use in a confined space. A polearm ends up being a glorified spear, as does a Zweihander (big two-handed German sword). You can't swing them, all you can do is thrust. Military types have been aware of that for years, so all bigger weapons tended to have a thrusting point at the end.

In clear space, the polearm and two-handed sword have the advantage over the sword and shield carrier. Unless the swordsman can close his range (using the sweep or press manoeuvres for example), he is very vulnerable. The bigger weapons can strike him without him being able to hit back, his shield will often get severely damaged by the attacks against him, and he could even break his arm trying to block the heavier blows.

Skilled users of the bigger weapons know how to keep themselves at their effective combat range. This is where they can hit you, but you can't reach them. If you try and close they will back off, swinging a low or high shot at the same time to try and cripple you. Once you lose a leg or an arm, it's game over. They can pick you off at their leisure. I have yet to encounter a game system that adequately allows for this. Most give advantages and penalties to weapons based on size, weight and manoeuvrability, but they don't address this fundamental difference in the way longer weapons are used compared to the shorter ones.

Wounds and Dying

As you might expect we try to avoid maiming and killing each other in Grey Co. It is meant to be simulated combat after all. We use a system of light touches to the body to signify killing or wounding blows. A touch to the head, chest or

abdomen is a kill. A strike on the arms means that you lose the use of the arm. A leg hit means you have to kneel, and can't hobble very far. It is very stylised, yet it works as a rough approximation of real combat. We don't allow for such things as having an artery opened up or blood loss from many small wounds. Yet the simulation does show some basic aspects of combat. Whoever gets wounded first is odds on to lose the fight. This is especially true of a leg hit. Once you are down it is very hard to win from that position. Loss of an arm can be equally catastrophic. A two-handed weapon user is suddenly unable to use his weapon for anything except the most awkward and basic blocks. Killing strikes are effectively ruled out, though you may get a lucky shot in.

It can even affect a sword and shields man pretty badly. If you lose your primary arm, that means you can't wield your sword. Given a chance you may be able to drop the shield and transfer it your other arm. Few opponents would give you that chance. If you lose the shield arm, you have now lost your primary defence. Sword blocks are effective but will blunt a real sword quickly and even risk breaking it.

Experience has shown that even a modern reenactor can fight on with minor cuts and bruises, even a broken forearm. Yet once the fight ends, that adrenalin rush fades and the pain signals start to let you know that the irritating knock you took earlier was a little more serious. I am sure many warriors throughout history have fought their way through to battle's end, only to collapse moments later. Their body finally got in touch with the brain - "You're dead! Fall over already!"

Reenactment of ancient warfare is a great way to meet interesting people. It also lets you examine many of the ideas that both historians and game writers have used and see if they are plausible. If you want to meet or talk with the Grey Company, get in touch with us at the following address:

Grey Company (Inc.), PO Box 113, North Perth, WA 6006

Oh, and in case you were wondering about my exclusive usage of the male pronoun in this article, some of our most skilled and experienced warriors are women. ■



automata. The last 18 pages of the 128 page book give the hard gaming rules for Hosts (flexible as always).

I never thought I'd say this about a Castle Falkenstein product, but I was disappointed with *Lost Notebooks*. Interspersed with the plans are diary entries made by Leonardo. It is the events of his time that cause him to design most of these inventions, and in that sense, this aspect of the book at least ties this all together logically. However, the specific events depicted really serve no other purpose. These are events 300 years removed from the New Europa timeline. It's hard enough to get yourself comfortably around 1870s European history, let alone being sidetracked by the machinations of the Borgias.

And, without going into too much detail, unless you are fabulously wealthy, own a meteorite, or just happen to be a close personal friend of Tom Olam and Co - don't even think about trying to create one of these devices. While a campaign involving a journey to some distant crater to get enough Star Iron (without which, your machine *will not* work) to make your engine has great gaming potential (why does the *Hand of Vermiculite* keep jumping into my head?), those unable to do so are left with theft as the only option. Bad news if you want to stay on the right side of the law.

I don't know, perhaps I was spoiled by *Book of Sigils*, but this book really didn't inspire me to strap on my sword, load up my reciprocator and take on impossible odds. Instead, I found *Lost Notebooks* a lot of space for one plot device. For completists only.

INVASION TERRA

Mekton Zeta Campaign Book

R Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Michael Bell

The latest offering for *Mekton Zeta* is this set of linked scenarios based on a campaign setting hinted at in the main rules book. **Invasion Terra** describes how a ruthless alien (is there any other kind) star-spanning empire, on discovering Earth, sets out to add it to its real estate portfolio, and how the numerically and technological inferior humans object most bitterly to this and proceed to fight back. Despite the odds against them the humans manage to overcome adversity and send the aliens packing (*Independence Day* has nothing on this).

The material in this book is set up primarily for table-top miniature combat, however a keen referee could easily expand it into a good roleplay campaign. Each scenario comes complete with background material, a terrain map, descriptions of the forces involved, their starting deployments and the victory conditions. Also provided is a time line for the Invasion Terra conflict.

The usefulness of this supplement really depends on what you are doing with *Mekton Zeta*. If you are playing the Invasion Terra campaign setting then it is a must have. If you are an Angol player it is less useful although some of the scenarios could be readily adapted. If you've developed your own setting then its usefulness is debatable. However the package is very well produced, with fine artwork, and well worth a look if you are a Mekton player.

MYTHOS

Call of Cthulhu Trading Card Game.

Chaosium Inc

Review by Chris Johnson

Just as *On The Edge* is the CCG for *Over the Edge* and *Rage* is the CCG for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*, **Mythos** is the CCG for *Call of Cthulhu*, which itself is based in the Horror stories of H.P. Lovecraft. I must admit at this time that I haven't read any of Lovecraft's tales, in fact I rarely find horror that really appeals to me, and I haven't played *Call of Cthulhu* before. So **Mythos** was behind the eight-ball to start with, at least in the depth to which I would appreciate the detail. This said, on with the review.

First impressions (a brief glance at the rules and a quick look at the cards) were good. The artwork has the range of *Spellfire*, that is, from really nice to downright ugly, but that is a good thing, something for everyone. The game itself reminds me of the Indiana Jones movies. You play one particular character, searching around cities for artifacts and the Truth, confronting fears (Indy, why is the floor moving?), finding allies. In fact, one of the Investigators you can play is an archaeologist. You can also be a reporter, a cleric, even a beggar, more like a class than a character. For the roleplayers, there's also a healthy (?) dose of monsters and spells. And these are real, and original, monsters. No *D&D* clones here.

After a long read throughout the, somewhat involved, rules, the basic

structure of the game started to take form in my mind, slowly congealing from previously half-formed concepts. It's an adventure game, where your adventures slowly build a story. The playing itself should be enough, not just the winning (or losing). Seeing what happens each game is more the point than pounding the tar out of your opponents. Compulsive winners willing to out-buy the competition will not enjoy this game, the point is to have a different experience each time. Listening, Troy?

The gameplay is fairly fast-paced, switching back and forth between players very rapidly. This means that one player will not get bored while the other goes about their turn. This was indeed an aim of Chaosium, to make the game feel more like a traditional card game. Building the deck is fun too. Anyone out there who has roleplayed will know the joys of building a detailed character, spending hours each night, looking through sourcebook after sourcebook, putting together just the right character. Well, building a deck for *Mythos* can be very similar, as cards build on other cards so much. And, like in a roleplaying game, you can play a single one-off adventure, or else go for the longer term goals of a campaign length game.

The card stock is excellent too, a nice sealed, slick stock. The entire production feels of a high quality. Ignoring the art, the graphic design of the cards is clear and consistent. Much more professional than most of the others on the bandwagon.

I've seen boxes and boosters of *Mythos* everywhere since I first started this review, so you should have no problems getting hold of some. And while you're out, have a look for Lovecraft's books.

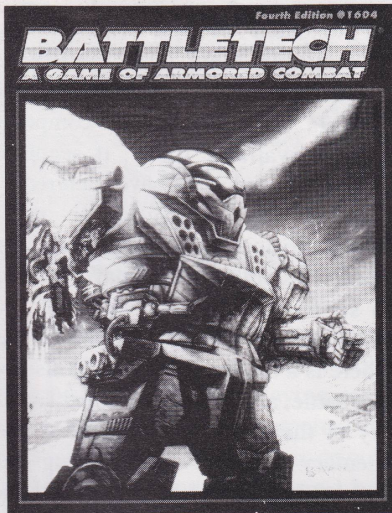
BATTLETECH, 4TH Edition

Tabletop Armoured Combat Game

FASA Corporation

Reviewed by Ron Fielding

BattleTech, 4th Ed. is exactly the same great game of mechanised combat set in the distant future but with all new packaging. The loss of the neat plastic 'mech miniatures is almost compensated for by the full colour treatment in the rulebooks and the replacement solid card mech coloured silhouettes. These are well done, printed both sides, and with the 144 unit identification stickers thrown in for good measure are quite colourful. Still, they don't *feel* as good to move around as the plastic figures do.



Other components include two large hex-marked terrain maps, dice, plastic bases for the 'mechs, a book of rules (quick start and advanced), an introduction to BattleTech book and a booklet of battlemech record sheets for the standard 'mechs supplied in this boxed set. Although this latter booklet includes all the charts you need in play, a card stock Quick Reference chart would have been a nice addition.

I reviewed BattleTech back in issue 10 and I still stand by my assessment that it is one of the more enjoyable, "simple to learn, fun to play" wargames available. These days it faces stiff competition from *Mekton Zeta* and *Heavy Gear*, but to my mind *BattleTech* still leads the way

JAGGED ALLIANCE: DEADLY GAMES

Technothriller Computer Action Game
Sirtech

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

Deadly Games is a sequel to the *Jagged Alliance* computer game (see my review in issue 25). It introduces a lot of great stuff to that already great game - new mercs to hire, new weapons ("Gimme da mortar!"), new terrain, a scenario editor, multiplayer capability (via modem, network or serial cable) and a wide choice of scenarios and campaigns. The only disappointment is that one of the great strengths of *Jagged Alliance* has been taken away - the roleplaying aspect.

In *Jagged Alliance* there was an underlying plot that tied the 60 scenarios together, a story that had you wanting to explore one episode further to see what the bad guy, Santino, had up his sleeve as you worked hard to retake Metavira Island. That aspect of the game, the main thing

that kept me playing, has been removed from *Deadly Games*. Now each scenario has a clearly defined objective, and the objectives are varied enough to make them all worth exploring, but even in the longer campaigns there is no theme or structure tying these objectives together. Another part of the roleplaying appeal of the earlier game was that your hand-picked team of mercs gradually grew in experience and skills as the campaign progressed; well now there simply isn't the time for this in the shorter campaigns, and without a storyline I was not inclined to play all through the longer campaigns.

Actual game play is pretty much the same as before, although the variety of missions has improved. Stalking the enemy and shooting them dead is still the central theme, and the guns, armour and other assorted gear you gain to make this easier are fun to collect. Plus the new mercs have a lot of personality and the digitised voice grabs are hilarious.

Replayability for action fans is there aplenty. There are a lot of missions, and you can design your own with the scenario editor. Plus the terrain is now more varied, including urban landscapes. I found a number of the missions extremely frustrating, however, as even on easier levels of play (there are several ways of manipulating the game to do this) it was nigh impossible to achieve your objectives in the turn limit set. Losing a merc to a grenade-launching enemy hidden in the last screen after carefully crawling him around the map for 29 turns was not my idea of a good joke.

Overall I'd say if I hadn't played *Jagged Alliance* first I'd be giving this game great wraps. It does look, sound and play great, and it has heaps of options plus a multiplayer capability for extra fun against real live opponents, it is just that I felt let down after the much better (in my view) earlier version of the game.

ALTERNATE EARTHS

GURPS Supplement

Steve Jackson Games

Reviewed by Dan Gilbert

If you have seen *Sliders* then you will have a fairly good idea of what this book is all about. In a nutshell, there are six alternate Earths presented. Each has come into being as a result of a particular pivotal point in history being different from that of our own familiar Earth.

The material is aimed at players of the

GURPS Infinite Worlds campaign, and they admit that some of the stuff is really only of use to them. However, the six Earths presented do cover an interesting range of parallel worlds so you can use them to spice up a flagging campaign.

There is quite a lot of information packed in about each of the alternate Earths. Topics include how the average citizen lives, past history summaries, weapons and technology and political power. Unfortunately, in a 128 page book you are not going to get extensive details on each world. The referee is going to have to do lot of hard work to make them into long term campaign settings. There are no ready to run adventures either - this is all background material, albeit with a number of plot hooks.

Production values are high; average to good artwork, index, well set out format and an intriguing read. In summary, I would say this is one for a very specific campaign style of travelling parallel Earths, but give it a look, you may find yourself plotting a shift of locale for those pesky adventurers.

BATTLEGROUNDS 4: SHILOH

Computer CD-Rom Wargame
Talon Soft

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

They don't understand do they? After spending three hours manoeuvring forty thousand men into position, they yell "Turn it off and come and get your tea!"

For wannabe generals **Battleground 4: Shiloh** is just about as good as it gets. The game nips along at a good pace, and movement between the various map modes is quick and easy. The game is played on a lush SVGA artist-drawn map. Some of the detail is quite amazing (check out the washing hanging out on the line in the camps). The troops look like tabletop miniatures and each formation (column, line, routed etc.) is also clearly recognisable. You can also switch to a 2D version, with the traditional hex-board and icon view; essential for seeing the "big picture". Sound effects are nothing special, little explosions and a few groans. There is also a selection of stirring songs from the Civil War period. Add to this video sequences featuring Civil War reenactment groups firing artillery, advancing, meleeing etc. and you have a number of entertaining options that can be cycled on or off as the mood takes you.

Talon Soft also supply an excellent manual, easy to use reference card and in depth online detail on the history, commanders, troops of the battle.

The game is driven through use of either icons or drop down menus to order selected units to move, change facing, change formation, limber/unlimber, fire, melee etc.. You can even construct breast works. The more you push your men, the more likely they are to fall to fatigue and possibly rout when attacked. Supply, command control, all the elements you would expect from a good wargame are here, and happily looked after by your CPU. So far the game is looking good.

The Battle of Shiloh was fought over two days in 1862. It really is a wargamer's dream battle as both sides get to both attack and defend over the two days. The only let down is that your AI opponent is average at best. For example, when I first played the full campaign version, by 8am on Day Two the Confederates had lost 35 000 men to the Union's sixteen. Even facing this overwhelming defeat, the AI played on. Where's the mercy clause? One artillery unit parked itself so far away it had no chance of coming into play. Despite being continually out of supply, the AI commander failed to move its supply wagons to affected units. It readily abandoned objective squares, and didn't seem to concentrate forces anywhere. This imbalance can be redressed somewhat by altering advantages in favour of the AI forces, but this simply gives it more firepower, it doesn't make it any brighter. The answer? Find a friend. The game can be played multiplayer via modem, or, by utilising the "hot-seat" option (line of sight and hidden movement applies), on the same computer. Then *Shiloh* comes into its own, a far more satisfying challenge against someone with wetware!

The verdict. If you enjoy wargames, then this is a must for you. Get it!

THE DRACONIS COMBINE FIELD MANUAL

Battletech Supplement

FASA Corporation

Reviewed by Michael Bell

The Draconis Combine Field Manual is a sourcebook describing the military forces of House Kurita and the Draconis Combine following the victory of the Inner Sphere over the Clans at Tukayyid. It gives extensive details on all

the regiments that comprise the Draconis Combine's military forces. Each unit has its history, officers and tactics described in detail. The unique abilities of these regiments are also discussed and how they translate into game mechanics!

The supplement also gives us new weapons, equipment and full stats and abilities of the Draconis Combine's latest BattleMechs; the Akuma and the No-Dachi. All the material in this book is compatible for use with either *BattleTech* or *MechWarrior*.

The book is crisp, clean and well laid out with some nice colour artwork in the centre pages. Its usefulness depends on what you want to get out of the game. If you are into roleplay mixed with table top battles and your players are either working for, or fighting against the Combine then you will find this supplement a very valuable addition. On the other hand, if a Sunday afternoon clash between two or more faceless 'mech lances is your thing then you'll probably find this sourcebook of limited use even though some of the new weapons and 'mechs are jolly.

Overall the product is well assembled and I recommend it to those who enjoy background material with real substance, non-player characters with personality and 'mech units with interesting individuality.

THE WAR COLLEGE

Universal Military Simulator 3

Computer CD-Rom Wargame

Gametek

Reviewed by Graham Holman

Gametek's new release **UMS 3** is a revised look at the old UMS version that was available on the Amiga in the good old days - long, long ago. Involving four of history's outstanding generals - Caesar, Napoleon, Lee and Hindenburg - the battles of Pharsalus, Austerlitz, Antietam and Tannenberg are included here.

UMS, to those that remember, was a game that involved lots of looking at endless line drawn units on a topography map, with 360 degree scrolling that gave awkward angles that caused all the unit names to combine into a giant spaghetti on the screen. Needless to say, the game has come a long way from there. Colour, shading, improved graphic quality and an improved game machine gives the whole game a much easier playability and a vastly better look. Manoeuvring around the game map is enhanced through the easy zoom options which allow easy

access to each of the map levels. Disappointingly there is no ability to scroll around the map when in the lower zoom levels. Given the level of computer technology available today, it seems a basic flaw that need never have occurred.

This is the probably the most consistent criticism of the game. The designers constantly seem to have decided to do so much then stop short of the mark. In the War College section of the disk there is a basic run down and history of each battle, and the political and social history of the period. Nice pictures and commentary and a basic unit listing and then what? Nothing!!! Where are all the other screens? Surely there must be another section I haven't been able to get in to. No, that's it. It gives you that sort of "Well I really thought there would have been more" feeling.

Make no mistake though, playing the game can be quite fun. Sure your units don't always respond to your orders, and the relative sizes of opposing units is sometimes confusing, but the game system is easy to play, and the battles are quite historically realistic. It ain't no *Command and Conquer*, and you won't see the gore of *Doom*, but you will get four decent scenarios that represent four of the most famous battles of their period. If you are into boardgames and wargaming, *UMS 3* is a good addition to your collection. Give it a go.

PALLADIUM: 2ND EDITION

Fantasy Roleplaying Game

Palladium Book, Inc

Reviewed by Andrew "Wilson" Daniels

First released in 1983, **Palladium** has always been up against its older brother, *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*. So how does it stack up? Let's find out.

The 2nd edition revises and consolidates many of the changes and variations that have sprung up in the many supplements released since 1983. *Palladium* is compatible with the entire Palladium Megaverse, which opens up a wealth of material in *RIFTS*, *Nightbane*, etc. that's ready to slot into your fantasy campaign. This interlinking is one of the great strengths of all the Palladium games.

Palladium: 2nd Edition comes as a 300 page softbound book (the cover tends to curl up annoyingly) laid out in an unexciting but functional style, packed with quality black and white illustrations. It opens with a "how to" guide on

roleplaying aimed at the novice gamer; what it's all about, dice, characters, including a useful glossary of both generic gaming terms and *Palladium* specific terms, although "Pass the chip bowl", seems to be strangely missing.

Characters have eight basic attributes, I.Q., Mental Endurance, Mental Affinity, Physical Strength, Physical Prowess, Physical Endurance, Physical Beauty and Speed. No real surprises there. Hit Points (seen those before, too) are based on your P.E. plus 1d6 per level. Actually, I quite like the hit point recovery system; getting Non-Professional first aid enables you to recover 2 hp/day, but Professional help increases this up to 4 per day. Of course there is also the ubiquitous and far quicker magical healing. There are optional wound effect tables for those who like a little added realism describing the game effects of such nasty injuries as a punctured lung.

Something unique to *Palladium* is S.D.C. (Structural Damage Capacity). Everything - people, walls, doors, furnishings, armour - has a rating showing how much damage it can withstand. Characters generally lose S.D.C. before they lose hit points (real wounds) which gives the game its high adventure tone; our heroes can survive mighty blows and magic. More bookwork, but it's definitely worth it.

Alignment is defined not in abstract terms (Law/Good) but as a character trait such as Scrupulous, Selfish, etc. and players are given a set of simple behavioural guidelines to follow. Yes it's basically the same deal as in *AD&D*, but the descriptions and examples given make this problem area easier to follow.

Palladium uses experience points (XPs) much as many other RPGs do, to advance character levels and increase their powers, but it does reward roleplaying as well as wanton slaughter (the groups I've played in don't know the difference). Thus, avoiding unnecessary violence gains 100 XPs, and a successful plan is valued more highly than killing a major menace.

Next, there are notes on building a character's background; mostly lists with not much solid material to work on.

Selecting from a comprehensive list of skills defines what your character can and can't do. Some skills are class driven (all men-at-arms have weapon skills) and others secondary or optional skills that characters are deemed to have picked up in extra-curricular downtime (Whittling!).

Speaking of character classes (O.C.C.s in *Palladium*) there are four different types of priest given, eight men-at-arms, six magicians plus a bunch of psychics and some odd optionals. (Yes, sir! I really want to play a peasant farmer!). Each is

several specialisations. Magic is commonplace; magical energy ebbs and flows along ley lines that crisscross the world and is drawn directly from these natural phenomena, an ability which everyone has to some degree. Of course, only those who have sufficient understanding and mental discipline can advance to any extent in the art ("Just as it should be!" says Wilson). Magic is cast by expending Potential Psychic Energy (P.P.E.), a character resource like hit points which replenishes (slowly). This is a neat system that generally integrates with the combat system a little bit better than the *AD&D* version does.

The book contains a long section on the equipment, history, geography, races and creatures of the *Palladium* World to get you started, although all details are inevitably brief in a book that contains both the game system and campaign world. A nice touch is that in addition to playing the standard four fantasy races (human, elf, dwarf and gnome) players may play any of the eight monster (giants, goblins, orcs, wolven etc.) races. The rulebook is rounded off with a collection of demons. Why? I don't know. Some lighter monster fodder may have been more appropriate but obviously Siembieda likes to throw players in the deep end.

So should you chose to play *Palladium* over *AD&D*? If you are happy with *AD&D* there is no single compelling reason to switch. But if you are just starting out, or you are looking for a change of pace then *Palladium* is a very good alternative with several advantages. The sheer wealth of character races, classes, skills, magic, monsters etc. (plus those in their other games), although a little daunting at first, does give you a lot of options to explore. And the rules are simple and clearly explained (although the book is laid out in a strange order and there is no index). And the *Palladium* World certainly has a different feel to it - high fantasy mixed with great dollops of spiky stuff. Fast, fun and powerful.

If you are looking for varied and imaginative characters and an instantly playable system, this is the one.



described in terms of history, allegiances, skills, likely motivations, psionic powers and spells (if applicable).

Combat is divided into 15 second melee rounds and follows a four step sequence: One, roll for initiative (highest on d20); two, roll to strike (d20 result compared with the defender's armour rating); three; defender attempts a parry, dodge or entangle; four, calculate damage (deduct this from the armour or body depending on the penetration of the attack). In play combat flows along quickly and my players, given a chance to parry/dodge, felt more in control of their fate than in standard *AD&D* combat.

In *Palladium* psionics and magic are varied and interesting, although still dependent on long spell lists. Both psionics and magic are divided into

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POCKET REVIEWS

Cybergeneration, 2nd Edition (R.Talsorian Games) sees this *Cyberpunk 2020* supplement revamped as a stand-alone with all the rules and tools necessary to play it without reference to the parent game. Added to these changes is a wad of new background info on Cybergen's alternative future Incorporated States of America, some of which will apparently reappear in the planned *ISA Sourcebook*. So, if you've already got the first edition book you probably don't need the second edition. If, however, you've not discovered *Cybergeneration* before, then check out our feature review in issue 14 where Adam called it "a class act".

Two new Cthulhu fiction anthologies are **The Dunwich Cycle** and **The Disciples of Cthulhu** (Chaosium Inc). Apart from being very cool collections of some of the best "cerebral" horror short fiction around and thoroughly entertaining reads, these books also positively throb with great adventure

hooks and potential storylines for your *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns. They are also present good object lessons in how to scare the dice out of your players' hands without having to resort to showering them with buckets of sloppy entrails and the shatter-ing of bones. Recommended reading for horror genre RPG players.

Volo's Guide to the Dalelands

(TSR) has been around for a while but I thought we'd mention it here as I've just finished reading it, and enjoyed it. Although a bit silly in places (I think Ed Greenwood is fixated on wine, women and food... but then aren't most of us?),

the depth of detail and plenitude of good solid adventure hooks make it a worthwhile buy for any AD&D referees playing in the *Forgotten Realms* campaign setting. Covering that region known as the Dalelands, this book, like the other *Volo Guides*, wins over the boxed sets in my opinion because all the information is supplied in a cheery, chatty tone without the game statistics and rules that bog down those bigger supplements.

Throal: The Dwarf Kingdom (FASA) is an *Earthdawn* sourcebook of great weight and importance focusing on "the dominant power in Barsaive". A must-have for *Earthdawn* groups, this book could, with a fair bit of adaptive work, but used as a source for anyone wanting to inject a dwarf realm with a difference into their fantasy campaign. Alongside a comprehensive guide to the kingdom, its culture, history, political and economic structure, are numerous fascinating personalities.

Several campaign, adventure and encounter idea headings appear in each chapter so that you're not left wondering

what to do with the abundant background material. Solid writing and plentiful art (including colour six plates) round out this worthy product.

Not strictly a gaming product, we'd like to mention **Aurealis** (Chimaera Publications) as a great source of science fiction, and to a lesser extent, fantasy and horror stories that you could adapt as plots for use in your roleplaying games. *Aurealis* publishes excellent Australian speculative short fiction, and is a good place for budding authors to try to sell there stuff. A regular publishing industry news column also helps debutantes with information on how and where to get into print. Issue # 18 is now available on newsstands Australia-wide.

In issue 28 we reviewed the *DarkStryder Campaign* boxed set for the Star Wars RPG, well now we've received the second of the follow-up products, **The Kathol Rift** (West End Games). Still chasing rogue Imperial Moff Sarne, the player characters arrive at the Kathol Rift, a "seething cauldron of galactic power" that does all sorts of strange (magical?) things. Will they survive the "final showdown with Sarne and his mysterious benefactor, DarkStryder"? This tidy 96 page book provides background, keyed location maps and NPCs for six adventures that interact, supplement and tie-off those threads introduced in the earlier campaign box and *Kathol Outback*.

An impressive alternative campaign for Star Wars worth checking out.

A superb product worth looking out for if you can get your hands on it is **FUDGE** (Grey Ghost Games). This "freeform universal do-it-yourself gaming engine" is a roleplaying game that, like *Theatrix* (reviewed in issue 29) can be readily adapted to any gaming genre and, if that's your go, played completely without dice. What lifts *FUDGE* to new heights of excellence, however, is the way it encourages and guides through designing your very own personalised RPG using the basic building blocks supplied by its author, Stefan O'Sullivan. Originally distributed via the Internet, buyers are actively encouraged to design and distribute their own *FUDGE*-based games so long as they include copyright notices and a disclaimer. Way cool!

FUDGE Unae, anyone? ■

The earliest interpretation of cyberpunk that I can remember likened the genre to Philip Marlowe meets Science Fiction. A hard, gritty blend of tough detectives, dark streets and dirty deeds with a healthy dose of future shock thrown in. This is exactly what **Metal Fatigue** (Harper Collins, \$12.95) by Sean Williams offers, and I loved it from the first chapter.

This is Williams' first solo novel and he has crafted a well visualised post-war America. The once proud USA has been devastated by terrible wars fought with bio-modified troops and high tech weapons. What now remains are small city states, roaming bands of nomads and some newly emerging nations. The key action takes place in Kennedy, a city which survived the downfall of the USA by isolating itself behind electrified walls and remote machine gun turrets. Yet the city is still failing, as resources within the city are slowly recycled beyond useability.

Enter the Re-United States of America, a vibrant and powerful military nation which has risen from the ashes to unify the land. They want Kennedy to join them, and the city has to decide whether to accept them or keep its isolation.

Against this backdrop of political manoeuvres we witness the lives of officer Phil Roads and his (female) sidekick Barney. They are given the task of trying to solve some strange thefts, apparently associated with murders of key political figures who were in favour of joining the RUSA. It soon becomes obvious that the person or persons committing these crimes is bio-modified, an illegal relic of the wars that shattered the nation.

Sean treats his characters well, giving depth to their lives and personality in their souls. Phil Roads is an interesting mix of hard boiled detective and world weary war veteran. Some of the other characters aren't as well defined, but the story's based around Phil, so they don't need to be.

If I had one complaint about the novel, it's that the finale dragged on a little too long. It would certainly make an excellent movie ending, but just went slightly over time for me. Despite that, the resolution of the mystery was a surprise to me, yet fitted well once the clues came together.

It is great to realise that Sean is from Adelaide. This is quality stuff from a local talent and I hope to see more of his work, especially if he bases it in the setting he has established with *Metal Fatigue*.

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul Mitting checks out the cyberpunk scene.

A new Shadowrun novel is **Preying For Keeps** (ROC, \$11.00) by Mel Odom. I have read some of Mel's work previously, before he started writing for FASA and TSR, and really enjoyed it. His "Lethal Interface" is one of those classic blends of Police detective meets Cyberpunk. This latest work has elements of his other stories that I found enjoyable. Plenty of action, a rugged but humane central character, and a typically convoluted storyline.

The plot involves Jack Skater and his team being set up when they do a run against an elven ocean freighter. Double-dealing and half glimpsed truths dog the team as they fight to stay alive. They come against an Elven corp, the Yakuza and a powerful Mafia crimelord. Suffice to say that there is enough action and intrigue to satisfy the ShadowRun fan. There are no great revelations about the Awakened world to be found here, but that was fine by me.

Despite being a good read, I felt that Mel was not entirely comfortable in the ShadowRun setting. He mentions in his opening blurb about having to read all the supplements and rules to try and get the feel of ShadowRun. He came close, but I believe he writes better as an independent author. Definitely one for Shadowrun readers, however for the rest I'd recommend his earlier work.

William Gibson is acknowledged by many as the father of the cyberpunk genre. His latest novel, **Idoru** (Viking, \$19.95) is set firmly in that genre, and as usual tackles a few issues that people today are only beginning to ponder.

The setting for much of the story is Tokyo, rebuilt after a cataclysmic earthquake. The future portrayed is the same one as in *Virtual Light*, set a little while later and with a few references to the

earlier work. Central to the story is the Idroru, a beautiful and mysterious media star named Rei Toei. She also happens to be a computer generated "virtual" entity, like those being touted as the future of Hollywood right now. A rumour gets out that the lead singer of a mega-famous band has decided to marry her. This of course causes hysteria amongst his legions of young female fans and huge anxiety to his managers. These two responses give us much of the storyline, which revolves around a fan named Chia and a netrunner named Laney.

Chia travels to Japan on behalf of her fan club to see if the rumour is true. Laney is hired by the band's management to see if he can extract from the mass of data available the reasons why he is doing this and when. Laney has the ability to see "nodal points" in people's lives from the data stored in the Net. He can detect patterns which point to likely events that happened or will happen. This is a pretty neat concept, and I imagine a few roleplayers may like to have this ability for their netrunners.

The writing style of the novel is a little distracting. The two main characters only meet briefly at the end and so much of the story is a back and forwards affair between the two plotlines. Gibson's writing ability and knowledge of computing technology has markedly improved so I found myself really enjoying the story as it unfolded and gained momentum. Then came the finale.

What a disappointment! The story just sort of ends, with a weak climax scene and a vague epilogue. All the effort that went into setting up the story and characters is simply lost. I wonder if Gibson lost heart with his creation and couldn't see how to finalise it. The potential of what he had established up to that point was magnificent -- virtual lifeforms, living nanotech buildings, the Walled City, all gone. Maybe the editors should go back to Gibson and demand a re-write.

All in all, an interesting but ultimately frustrating read. ■

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

"Sticks to snakes, only spell shaman's have."

- Wilson Wormke, just before the A-Team was incinerated by a chain-lightning spell.

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